



THE WORLD'S STORY TELLERS
EDITED BY ARTHUR RANSOME

STORIES
BY
PROSPER MERIMEE



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SUMMARISED CHRONOLOGY

Prosper Mérimée was born in Paris on September 28, 1803. His father was a professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and his mother, who had English blood in her, was also a painter. He was educated at the Collège Henri IV., and read for the Law. He passed his examinations but did not practise, spending his time reading foreign languages, particularly English, and in the intellectual society of Paris. He visited England for the first time in 1825. In 1830 he went to Madrid, where he made friends with the Countess de Montijo, mother of the Empress Eugénie. In 1834 he was made Inspector of Historical Monuments. He taught French to the little Eugénie, and when, in 1853, she married Louis Napoleon, he was made a Senator. He frequently visited London, and latterly had some of the duties of a private Ambassador. He travelled also on the Continent and in Asia Minor. He died on September 23, 1870, his death being perhaps hurried by the disasters of the War.

His first book was the Théâtre de Clara Gazul, 1825, a collection of dramatic pieces by an imaginary Spanish lady, for whose portrait he posed in a mantilla. His second was a collection of imaginary Illyrian ballads called La Guzla, 1827. La Chronique du temps de Charles IX., 1829, was

a historical novel. After 1829, when he published Mateo Falcone, he wrote tales from time to time, of which the most famous are La Venus d'Ille, 1837 ; Colomba, 1840 ; Arsène Guillot, 1844 ; and Carmen, 1845. He wrote also historical works and a large number of letters, of which several series were published after his death.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

THERE is a lean, athletic air about the tales of Prosper Mérimée. Their author is like a man who throws balls at the cocoa-nuts in the fair—to bring them down, and not for the pleasure of throwing. His writing was something quite outside himself, undertaken for the satisfaction of feeling himself able to do it. He was in the habit of setting himself tasks. 'I will blacken some paper,' he writes, 'in 1829,' and he keeps his word. He was not an author, in the modern professional sense, but a man, one of whose activities was authorship. There is a real difference between writers of these classes, the amateurs existing outside their work, the professionals breathing only through it. Gautier, full-blooded, brutal, splendid creature, is almost invisible but in his books. Mérimée, irreproachably dressed, stands beside his, looking in another direction. I am reminded of the sporting gentlemen of Hazlitt's day who now and again would step into the ring and show that they too had a pretty way with the gloves. Late in his life, when one of his juvenile theatrical pieces was to be played for the first time, Mérimée went to the performance, and

heard a hostile noise in the house. 'Is it me they are hissing?' he asked. 'I am going to hiss with the rest.' I think of Congreve asking Voltaire to consider him as a plain gentleman, not as an author.

Writing was only one of the interests of Mérimée's life; only one of the innumerable tasks he set himself. He learnt half a dozen languages without being a mere linguist. He travelled in half a dozen countries without being a traveller. He was extremely erudite, but never a bookish scholar. He fulfilled with enthusiasm his duties as Inspector of Ancient Monuments without lapsing into a dusty-handed antiquary. He saw much of the fashionable life of Paris without being a man of the world. He was a courtier without being nothing but a courtier, and could accomplish a state mission without turning into a diplomatist. He studied 'la théologie, la tactique, la poliorcétique, l'architecture l'épigraphie, la numismatique, la magie et la cuisine,' without being solely a theologian, a tactician, a specialist in sieges, an architect, a decipherer of inscriptions, a coin-collector, a wizard, or an undiluted cook. No more was he a writer, as Dumas, Hazlitt, Hawthorne and Keats were writers. On no shore did he burn his boats. His character was as various as his activities. He was sensualist and sentimentalist, dandy and Bohemian. Evenings begun in the salon of Mme. de Boigne or at the Hôtel Castellane were, his biographer tells us, finished behind the scenes at the Opera. He wrote delightful-love letters, but whole

series of his letters to his friends are unfitted for print by consistent indecency. He read his tales to his Empress, and told them in the gipsy tongue by the camp-fires of Andalusian muleteers. His experiments in literature were analogous to his experiments in cooking. Both were expressions of an intense curiosity about life and the methods of life, and a thirst for personal practical efficiency in them all. Never had man more facets in which to see the world. It is important in this essay, that considers only one of them, not to forget that there were others.

It is indeed not easy to see more than one facet of a man's personality at once, and difficult not to assume that this one facet is the whole. The *curés* of the old churches in France who saw Mérimée busied in protecting the ancient buildings from ruin and restoration would have been amazed by the witty dandy of the dinners in the Café de la Rotonde, or by the author of *Colomba*. Each one of such a man's expressions suggests a complete portrait, but only the composite picture tells the truth. It is difficult not to reason from his work, and build up an imaginary author—a discreet, slightly ironical person, who smiles only with the corners of his mouth, never laughs, never weeps, modestly disclaims any very personal connection with his tales, and is careful to seem as little moved as may be by the terrible or mysterious things he sets before us. This imaginary polite person, who represented Mérimée in conversation as well as in

books, is not Mérimée, but, just now, as I see him quietly smiling in the air before me, I know who he is. He is the conventional raconteur, whose manner every Englishman assumes in the telling of anecdote or ghost story.

Perhaps each nation has its own. Perhaps each nation adopts an attitude for anecdote peculiar to its own genius. The French at any rate is very different from the English. The Frenchman will gesticulate in his tale, suit the expression of his face to its emotions, and try, ingratiatingly, to win our indulgence for his story, that becomes, as he tells it, part of himself. The Englishman, more tenacious of his dignity, less willing to hazard it for an effect, throws all responsibility upon the thing itself. In England, the distinction between printed story-telling and story-telling by word of mouth is more marked than elsewhere. The object of both is to interest and move us, but, while the literary artist makes no bones about it, and takes every advantage possible, giving the setting of his tale, its colour scheme, its scent, its atmosphere, the plain Englishman shrinks from all assumption of craftsmanship, sets out his facts bare, rough like uncut stones, and repudiates by a purposely disordered language, perhaps by a few words of slang, any desire of competition with the professional. And we, the audience, allow ourselves to be moved more readily by an amateur than by a man who avows his intention of moving us. The avowed intention provokes a kind of hostility; it is a

declaration of war, an open announcement of a plan to usurp the throne of our own mind, and to order the sensations we like to think we can control. We are more lenient with the amateur; we wish to save his face; politeness and good-fellowship are traitors in our citadel, and we conspire with the enemy to compass our own yielding.

Mérimée gives his tales no more background than an Englishman could put without immodesty into an after-dinner conversation. He does not decorate them with words, nor try to suggest atmosphere by rhythm of any other of the subtler uses of language. He does not laugh at his jokes, nor, in moments of pathos, show any mist in his eyes. The only openly personal touches in his stories are those sentences of irony as poignant as those of another great conversationalist, whose *Modest Proposal* for the eating of little children is scarcely more cruel than *Matteo Falcone*. His style is without felicities. It has none of the Oriental pomp of Gautier's prose, none of the torrential eloquence of Hugo's; but its limitations are its virtues. Pomp is the ruin of a plain fact as of a plain man, and rhetoric rolls facts along too fast to do anything but smooth them. This style, that seems to disclaim any pretension to be a style at all, leaves facts unencumbered, with their corners unpolished. It emphasises Mérimée's continual suggestion that he is not a story-teller, and so helps to betray us into his power. But I cannot understand those critics who find it a style of clear glass

that shows us facts through no personality whatever. Always, in reading a Mérimée, I have an impression of listening to a man who has seen the world, and was young once upon a time, who loves Brantôme, and who in another century would have been a friend of Anthony Hamilton, and perhaps have written or had a minor part in memoirs like those of the Count Grammont. And this man is the imaginary mouthpiece of English anecdote, the mask handed from speaker to speaker at an English dinner-table.

Mérimée himself had something of the appearance of an Englishman; everything except the smile, according to Taine. No Frenchman can write of him without referring to his *anglomanie*. His mother had English relatives, and Hazlitt, Holcroft, and Hazlitt's worshipped Northcote were among his father's friends. He was not baptized in the Catholic religion. He seems to have grown up in an atmosphere not unlike that of many English intellectual families, and very early made friends across the Channel for himself. This Englishness perhaps partly accounts for the peculiar attitude he took as a story-teller, and also made possible that curious reconciliation between the virtues of rival schools that the attitude demanded, made possible, that is to say, the apparent paradox of a man whose subjects were Romantic, whose style was almost Classical, and whose stories were yet a prophecy of the Realists. It is not a French characteristic to recognise virtues in more than one type at once, and to combine

them. 'Le Roi est mort ; vive le Roi.' The French invented that saying. They do not recognise compromises, but are exclusive in their judgments, and regulate their opinions by general rules. A Romantic hates all Classicists, a Realist finds his worst term of opprobrium in the word Romantic. An Englishman, on the other hand, does not think of regulating his affections or actions by a theory. If he has principles, he locks them up with his black clothes for use on special occasions. He keeps a sturdy affection for Oliver Cromwell, without letting his love for the Commonwealth abate in the least his loyalty to the King. Mérimée seems extraordinarily English in being able to use Romantic ideals, without using Romantic method.

The conversational story-telling depends for its success, not on the wit or charm of the talker, but on the plots of his stories. No more exigent test of the intrinsic power of a tale can be applied than this, of telling it baldly in conversation. A good story will sometimes gain by the naked recital of its facts ; a bad one is immediately betrayed. Bad stories, in this sense, are those that resemble the women of whom Lyly wrote :—'Take from them their periwigges, their paintings, their Jewells, their rowles, their bowlstrings, and thou shalt soone perceive that a woman is the least part of hir selfe.' How many times, in repeating to a friend the story of a book, you have become suddenly aware it was an empty, worthless thing that, in clothes

more gorgeous than it had a right to wear, had made you its dupe for a moment. Mérimée was compelled by his method to tell good stories or none. His material, to be sufficiently strong to stand without support, to be built with rigid economy, and to make its effects out of its construction, to be told as if with a desire of making no impression, and to make an impression all the stronger for such telling, could not be of a light or delicate nature. His events had to be striking, visible, conclusive. He had to choose stories in which something happened. There is death in almost every one of his tales. Hence comes the amazing contrast between his work and that of the Romantics. The large gesture, the simple violent passions are his as well as theirs, because he needed them, but, while they matched their subjects in their temperaments, and wrote of hot blood with pulsing veins, everything in Mérimée's stories is vivid and passionate except the author. The atmosphere of his tales is not warm or moist, but extraordinarily rarified. In that clear air his colours seem almost white. If they were not so brilliant we should not perceive them at all. Even his women are chosen for the attitude. The women a man loves are usually reflected in his work. But Mérimée's women are the women of Romance, dying for love or for hate, ready at any moment to throw their emotions into dramatic action, while the women he loved were capricious, whimsical, tender seldom, *outrées* never. The writer needed

picturesque women as clear as facts. The man loved women who never betrayed themselves, but were sufficiently elusive to give him an Epicurean pleasure in pursuing them.

The art of Mérimée's tales is one of expository construction. He was compelled by his self-denials to be as conscious an artist as Poe. He is like a good chess-player who surrenders many pieces, and is forced to make most wonderful play with the few that remain. His effects are got from the material of his tales, not superimposed on the vital stuff like the front of a Venetian palace on the plain wall. He takes his dramatic material, and sets it before us in his undecorated style, so that no morsel of its vitality is wasted, smothering no wild emotion in elaborate drapery, but cutting it out so nakedly that every quivering sinew can be seen. His art has been compared to drawing, but it is more like sculpture. His stories are so cleanly carved out of existence that they are 'without deception.' We can examine them from above and from below, in a dozen different lights. There is no point of view from which the artist begs us to refrain. Behind a drawing there is a bare sheet. Behind a story of Mérimée's there is the other side.

His art is more like painting in those few tales of the marvellous that are his ghost stories, as the others are his anecdotes. Mérimée had the archæologist's hatred of the mysterious, and the artist's delight in creating it. He reconciled the two by pro-

ducing mysterious effects by statements of the utmost clarity, the very clarity of the statements throwing the reader off his guard so that he does not perceive the purposeful skill with which they are chosen and put together. There is a school of painting in France, whose followers call themselves Pointillists; they get their effects by laying spots of simple colours side by side, each one separate, each one though in the right position with regard to other spots of other colours placed in its neighbourhood. At a sufficient distance they merge luminously into the less simple colours of the picture. Mérimée's treatment of the marvellous was not unlike this. The vague mystery of *La Venus d'Ille* is not reflected by any vagueness or mystery in the telling of the tale. It is impossible to point to the single sentence, the single paragraph that makes the mystery mysterious. You cannot find them because they do not exist. Instead, there are a hundred morsels of fact. Not one of them is incredible; not one is without a reasonable explanation if an explanation is necessary. And yet all these concrete simple facts combine imperceptibly in producing the extraordinary supernatural feeling of the tale. Compare this negative manner of treating a miracle with the frank, positive fairy-tale of Gautier's *Arria Marcella*. The effects of both tales are perfectly achieved, but *Arria Marcella* belongs to written story-telling. We believe in her because Gautier wishes us to believe, and uses every means of colour and rhythm

and sensual suggestion to compel his readers to subject their imaginations to his own. The Venus belongs to story-telling by word of mouth. Hers is a ghost story whose shudder we covet, and experience, in spite of ourselves, in spite of the half-incredulous story-teller, by virtue of those simple facts so cunningly put together.

But to write analytically of such stories is to write with compass and rule, dully, awkwardly, technically, badly. It is impossible to express the excellence of a bridge except by showing how perfectly its curves represent the principles of its design, and to talk like an architect of the method of its building. And that is so very inadequate. It is easy to write of warmth, of delicacy, of sweetness; there is nothing harder in the world than to write of the icy strength that is shown not in action but in construction. And although there is a real charm about the shy, active, intellectual man who made them, a charm that is shown in his love-letters, yet there is no charm at all about Mérimée's stories. The difference between them and such tales as Nathaniel Hawthorne's is that between the little Grecian lady in baked clay, who stands upon my mantelpiece, still removing with what grace of curved body and neck and delicate arm the thorn that pricked her tiny foot some thousand years ago, and the copy of an Egyptian god, standing upright, one straight leg advanced, his jackal head set square upon his shoulders, his arms stiff at his sides, his legs like pillars,

so strong in the restraint of every line that to look at him is a bracing of the muscles. . There is no charm in him, no grace, no delicacy, and he needs neither delicacy, grace, nor charm. Erect in his own economy of strength he has an implacable, strenuous power that any added tenderness would weaken and perhaps destroy.

ARTHUR RANSOME.

MATEO FALCONE

GOING out of Porto-Vecchio and turning north-west, towards the interior of the island, you see the land rise pretty sharply, and, after a three hours' walk along winding paths, obstructed by great lumps of rock, and sometimes cut by ravines, you reach the edge of a most extensive *mâquis*.¹ The *mâquis* is the home of the Corsican shepherds and of whoever is in trouble with the police. You must know that the Corsican peasant, to save himself the trouble of manuring, sets fire to a stretch of wood; if the flames spread further than is necessary, so much the worse; but whatever happens, he is sûre of a good harvest from sowing on this ground, fertilised by the ashes of the trees it bore. When the corn has been gathered (they leave the straw, which would be a trouble to collect), the tree roots, which have stayed in the ground without wasting away, put forth very heavy shoots in the following spring, which in a few years reach a height of seven or eight feet. It is this species of close thicket that they call the *mâquis*. It is made up of different kinds of

¹ Bush country.

trees and shrubs mixed and entangled as God wills. Only with a hatchet in his hand can a man open himself a way through, and there are *mâquis* so thick and bushy that the wild rams themselves are unable to penetrate them.

If you have killed a man, go into the *mâquis* of Porto-Vecchio, and you will live there in safety, with a good gun, powder and shot; you must not forget a brown cloak with a hood to it, that will serve as covering and mattress. The shepherds give you milk, cheese, and chestnuts, and you will have nothing to fear from the law, or the dead man's relations, except when you have to go down into the town to renew your stock of ammunition.

Mateo Falcone, when I was in Corsica in 18—, had his house half a league's distance from the *mâquis*. He was a fairly rich man in the countryside; living as a gentleman, that is to say, without doing anything, on the produce of his flocks, that shepherds, a kind of nomads, pastured here and there over the mountains. When I saw him, two years after the incident I am about to relate to you, he seemed to me fifty years old at most. Imagine a man small but sturdy, with crisp hair, black as jet, large quick eyes, and a complexion the colour of boot-leather. His skill with the gun passed for extraordinary, even in his country where there are so many good shots. For example, Mateo would never fire at a wild ram with buck-shot; at a hundred and twenty paces, he would bring it down

with a bullet in the head or the shoulder as he chose. He used his weapon as easily at night as in the daytime, and I heard this proof of his skill, that will perhaps seem incredible to those who have not travelled in Corsica. At eighty paces, a lighted candle was placed behind a piece of transparent paper as big as a plate. He aimed. The candle was blown out, and, after a minute in the most absolute darkness, he fired and pierced the paper three times out of four.

With such transcendent merit, Mateo Falcone had won a great reputation. Men said he was as good a friend as he was a dangerous enemy: obliging too, and charitable, he lived at peace with everybody in the neighbourhood of Porto-Vecchio. But it was said of him that, at Corte, whence he had taken his wife, he had disembarrassed himself in the most vigorous manner of a rival accounted as redoubtable in war as in love; at least, to Mateo was attributed a certain shot that had surprised his rival shaving before a little mirror hung in his window. The affair was hushed up, and Mateo married. His wife Giuseppa had given him first three girls (at which he was enraged) and finally a boy, whom he called Fortunato, the hope of his family, heir to the name. The daughters were well married: their father could count at need on the poniards and carbines of his sons-in-law. The son was only ten years old, but already promised well.

One autumn day, Mateo went out early with his wife to visit one of his flocks in a clearing in the *maquis*.

Little Fortunato wanted to accompany him, but the clearing was too far away ; besides, it was very necessary that some one should stay to guard the house ; the father refused : we shall see if he had not good reason to regret it.

He had been away some hours, and little Fortunato was tranquilly stretched in the sun, looking at the blue mountains, and thinking that next Sunday he would be going to dinner in the town, at the house of his uncle the Corporal,¹ when he was suddenly interrupted in his meditations by the sound of a gun. He stood up and turned to the side of the plain whence the sound came. Other gunshots followed, fired at irregular intervals, and always nearer and nearer ; at last, a man appeared in the path leading from the plain to Mateo's house, a pointed cap on his head, like those worn by the mountaineers, bearded, in tatters, dragging himself with difficulty, leaning on his gun. He had just received a bullet in the thigh.

The man was a bandit,² who, having set off by night to get powder in the town, had fallen on the way into an ambuscade of Corsican light infantry.³ After a

¹ The Corporals were the chiefs taken by the Corsican Communes when they rebelled against the feudal lords. To-day the name is still sometimes given to a man who by his property, his alliances, and his *clientèle*, exercises an influence and a kind of practical magistracy over a *pieve* or canton. The Corsicans are divided by old custom into five castes : gentlemen (of whom some are *magnifiques* and other *signori*), *caporali*, citizens, plebeians, and foreigners.

² The word means here a proscribed man.

³ *Voltigeurs* in the French : a corps levied by the Government some years before Mérimée wrote. It worked in concert with the gendarmes for the maintenance of order.

vigorous defence, he had succeeded in making good his retreat, hotly pursued, and firing from rock to rock. But he had not much start of the soldiers, and his wound made it impossible for him to reach the *mâquis* before being caught up.

He came up to Fortunato, and said :

‘You are Mateo Falcone’s son?’

‘Yes.’

‘I am Gianetto Sanpiero. The yellow collars¹ are after me. Hide me, for I can go no further.’

‘And what will my father say, if I hide you without his leave?’

‘He will say you have done right.’

‘Who knows?’

‘Hide me quickly; they are coming.’

‘Wait till my father comes back.’

‘Wait! Confound it! They will be here in five minutes. Come, hide me, or I’ll kill you.’

Fortunato answered him with the utmost calm :

‘Your gun is not loaded, and there are no cartridges in your *caribera*.’²

‘I have my dagger.’

‘But will you run as quick as I?’

He made a bound and put himself out of reach.

‘You are not the son of Mateo Falcone. Will you let me be arrested in front of your house?’

¹ The uniform of the *voltigeurs* was at that time a brown tunic with a yellow collar.

² A leather belt, which serves to carry cartridges, and also as a purse.

The child seemed touched.

'What will you give me if I hide you?' he said, coming nearer.

The bandit rummaged in a leather pouch that hung at his belt, and took out a five-franc piece that he had no doubt kept to buy powder. Fortunato smiled at the sight of the piece of silver; he seized it and said to Gianetto:

'Fear nothing.'

Instantly he made a great hole in a hayrick placed near the house. Gianetto squatted down in it, and the child covered him up so as to leave him a little air to breathe, and yet so that it was impossible to suspect that a man was concealed in the hay. He bethought himself too of an ingenious piece of savage cunning. He fetched a cat and her little ones, and established them on the hayrick, to make believe that it had not been stirred for some time. Then, noticing traces of blood on the path close to the house, he covered them carefully with dust, and, that done, lay down again in the sun with the utmost tranquillity.

Some minutes later, six men in brown uniform with yellow collars, commanded by an adjutant, were before Mateo's door. The adjutant was distantly connected with Falcone. (It is well known that in Corsica degrees of relationship are counted farther than elsewhere.) His name was Tiodoro Gamba: he was a man of energy, much feared by the bandits, many of whom he had already run down.

'Good-day, little cousin,' said he, accosting Fortunato. 'How you have grown! Did you see a man pass by just now?'

'Oh, I am not yet as big as you, cousin,' the child answered with a simple air.

'That will come. But tell me, haven't you seen a man go by?'

'Have I seen a man go by?'

'Yes; a man with a pointed cap, and a waistcoat worked in red and yellow?'

'A man with a pointed cap, and a waistcoat worked in red and yellow?'

'Yes; answer quickly, and do not repeat my questions.'

'This morning, Monsieur the Curé went past our door on his horse Piero. He asked me how papa was, and I told him . . .'

'Ah, you young scamp, you are playing the fool! Tell me at once which way Gianetto went; he is the man we are after, and I am sure he took this path.'

'Who knows?'

'Who knows? I know you have seen him.'

'Does one then see passers-by when one is asleep?'

'Rogue, you were not asleep; the gunshots woke you up.'

'So you think, cousin, that your carbines make so much noise? My father's rifle makes much more.'

'May the devil take you, cursed scamp that you are! I am very sure you have seen Gianetto. Perhaps you

have even hidden him. Come, mates, into the house with you, and see if our man is not there. He was only going on one foot, and he has too much sense, the rascal, to try and reach the *mâquis* limping. Besides, the traces of blood stop here.'

'And what will papa say?' asked Fortunato, chuckling; 'what will he say when he hears that his house was entered while he was out?'

'Rogue!' said Adjutant Gamba, taking him by the ear, 'do you know that, if I like, I can make you change your tune? Perhaps, if I give you a score of blows with the flat of the sword, you will speak at last.'

And Fortunato went on chuckling.

'My father is Mateo Falcone,' he said, with emphasis.

'Do you know, little scamp, that I can take you off to Corte or to Bastia? I will put you to sleep in a cell, on straw, with irons on your feet, and I will have your head cut off unless you say where is Gianetto Sanpiero.'

The child broke into a laugh at this ridiculous threat. He said again:

'My father is Mateo Falcone.'

'Adjutant,' said one of the *voltigeurs* under his breath, 'do not let us get into trouble with Mateo.'

It was clear that Gamba was embarrassed. He spoke in a low voice to his men, who had already gone through the house. It was not a long business, for a Corsican's cottage is made up of a single square room. The furniture consists of a table, benches, chests,

household utensils, and the weapons of the chase. Meanwhile, little Fortunato stroked his cat, and seemed to find a malicious enjoyment in the discomfiture of the *voltigeurs* and his cousin.

A soldier came up to the hayrick. He saw the cat, and carelessly stuck a bayonet in the hay, shrugging his shoulders, as if he felt he were taking a ridiculous precaution. Nothing stirred; and the child's face did not betray the slightest emotion.

The adjutant and his men cursed their luck; they were already looking seriously towards the plain, as if ready to go back whence they had come, when their leader, convinced that threats would make no impression on Falcone's son, wished to make a final attempt, and try the effect of caresses and gifts.

'Little cousin,' said he, 'you seem to be a wide-awake young rogue! You will go far. But you are playing a risky game with me; and, if it were not for fear of troubling my cousin Mateo, devil take it, if I would not carry you off with me.'

'Bah!'

'But, when my cousin returns, I shall tell him the whole story, and he will give you the whip till the blood comes, for telling lies.'

'How do you know?'

'You will see. . . . But look here. . . . Be a good boy, and I will give you something.'

'As for me, cousin, I will give you a piece of advice; and that is, that if you dawdle any longer, Gianetto will

be in the *mâquis*, and it will take a smarter fellow than you to go and look for him there.'

The adjutant pulled a silver watch out of his pocket, worth a good ten crowns; and, noticing that little Fortunato's eyes glittered as they looked at it, dangled the watch at the end of its steel chain, and said :

'Scamp! you would be glad enough to have a watch like this hanging from your neck; you would walk in the streets of Porto-Vecchio, proud as a peacock; and people would ask you, "What time is it?" and you would say to them, "Look at my watch."'

'When I am big, my uncle the Corporal will give me a watch.'

'Yes; but your uncle's son has one already . . . not as fine as this it is true . . . and yet he is younger than you.'

The child sighed.

'Well, would you like the watch, little cousin?'

Fortunato, ogling the watch out of the corners of his eyes, was like a cat to whom one offers a whole chicken. The cat dares not put a claw on it, feeling that one is laughing at him, and turns away his eyes from time to time, so as not to succumb to the temptation; but he licks his lips continually, and seems to say to his master, 'What a cruel joke this is!'

And yet, Adjutant Gamba seemed to be making a real offer of the watch. Fortunato did not put out his hand, but said, with a bitter smile :

'Why are you laughing at me?'

'By God! I am not laughing. Only tell me where is Gianetto, and the watch is yours.'

Fortunato allowed an incredulous smile to escape him; and, fixing his black eyes on those of the adjutant, tried to read in them the good faith he sought for in the words.

'May I lose my epaulettes,' cried the adjutant, 'if I do not give you the watch on that condition! My fellows are witnesses, and I cannot unsay it.'

As he spoke, he brought the watch nearer and nearer till it almost touched the pale cheek of the child, whose face showed clearly how covetousness and the respect due to hospitality were contending in his soul. His bare breast heaved convulsively, and he seemed almost choking. Meanwhile the watch swung, and twisted, and sometimes touched the tip of his nose. At last, little by little, his right hand rose towards the watch; he touched it with the tip of his fingers; its whole weight was in his hand, without the adjutant, however, letting go the end of the chain . . . the face was blue . . . the case newly burnished . . . it seemed all on fire in the sun. . . . The temptation was too strong.

Fortunato lifted his left hand also, and indicated with his thumb, over his shoulder, the hayrick on which he leant. The adjutant instantly understood. He dropped the end of the chain. Fortunato felt himself sole possessor of the watch. He leapt with the agility of a deer, and put ten paces between himself and the

hayrick, that the *voltigeurs* immediately set to work to bring down.

It was not long before they saw the hay stir; a bleeding man came out of it, with a dagger in his hand; but, when he tried to get on his feet, his congealed wound prevented him from standing upright. He fell. The adjutant flung himself upon him, and wrested away his poniard. Immediately he was strongly bound, in spite of his resistance.

Gianetto, laid on the ground, and tied up like a bundle of sticks, turned his head towards Fortunato, who had come up again.

'Son of . . . !' he said, with more scorn than anger.

The child threw him the piece of silver he had had from him, feeling that he no longer deserved it; but the proscribed man did not seem to notice the action. He said very tranquilly to the adjutant:

'My dear Gamba, I cannot walk; you will have to carry me to the town.'

'You were running just now, quicker than a young goat,' retorted the cruel victor; 'but be easy: I am so glad to have got you, I would carry you a league on my back without feeling the weight. Anyhow, comrade, we will make you a litter with branches and your cloak, and we shall find horses at the farm of Crespoli.'

'Good,' said the prisoner; 'you will put a little straw on the litter, won't you, to make me more comfortable.'

While the *voltigeurs* were busy, some in making a sort of stretcher with branches of a chestnut-tree, others

in dressing Gianetto's wound, Mateo Falcone and his wife appeared suddenly at the bend of a path that led to the *maquis*. The woman was in front, bending heavily under the weight of a huge sack of chestnuts, while her husband strutted along, carrying nothing but a gun in his hand, and another slung on his back. It is beneath the dignity of a man to carry any other burden than his weapons.

Mateo's first thought on seeing the soldiers was that they had come to arrest him. But why this idea? Had Mateo then some quarrel with the law? Not at all. He enjoyed a good reputation. He was 'well spoken of' as the saying is; but he was a Corsican and a mountaineer, and there are few Corsican mountaineers who, if they look well into their memories, do not find there some peccadillo, a gunshot or a dagger-blow, or other bagatelle. Mateo had a clearer conscience than most; for it was ten years since he had aimed his gun at a man; but he was prudent nevertheless, and got ready to make a good defence, if need be.

'Wife,' said he, to Giuseppa, 'put down your sack, and be ready.'

She instantly obeyed. He gave her the gun from his bandolier which might have inconvenienced him. He cocked the one he had in his hand, and advanced slowly towards his house, keeping along the trees by the side of the path, and ready, at the slightest sign of hostility, to throw himself behind the biggest trunk, whence he would be able to fire from cover. His wife

walked at his heels, holding his spare gun, and his cartridge-box. It is the business of a good wife, in case of battle, to load her husband's weapons. . . .

The adjutant, on the other side, was considerably troubled at seeing Mateo advance in this manner, with measured steps, his gun ready, and his finger at the trigger.

'If by chance,' he thought, 'Mateo should be a relation of Gianetto, or a friend, and should wish to defend him, the bullets of his two guns will reach two of us, as sure as a letter by post, and, if he should aim at me in spite of our relationship . . . !'

In the difficulty he made a very courageous resolve, and that was to go forward to meet Mateo by himself, and tell him about the matter, accosting him as an old acquaintance; but the short distance that separated him from Mateo seemed terribly long.

'Hola there, old comrade,' he cried, 'how are you, old man? It is I, Gamba, your cousin.'

Mateo, without answering a word, had stopped, and, as the other spoke, slowly raised the barrel of his gun, so that at the moment when the adjutant came up to him it was pointed to the sky.

'Good-day, brother,'¹ said the adjutant, holding out his hand. 'It is a very long time since I last saw you.'

'Good-day, brother.'

'I had come to give good-day to you in passing, and to my cousin Pepa. We have made a long march

¹ *Buon giorno, fratello*, is the ordinary Corsican greeting.

to-day; but we must not complain of being tired, for we have made a famous capture. We have just got hold of Gianetto Sanpiero.'

'God be praised,' cried Giuseppa; 'he robbed us of a milch-goat last week.'

These words rejoiced Gamba.

'Poor devil,' said Mateo, 'he was hungry.'

'The rogue defended himself like a lion,' pursued the adjutant, a little taken aback; 'he killed one of my *voltigeurs*, and, not content with that, broke Corporal Chardon's arm; but that is no great harm, he was only a Frenchman. . . . Then he had hidden himself so well that the devil could not have discovered him. Without my little cousin Fortunato, I should never have been able to find him.'

'Fortunato!' cried Mateo.

'Fortunato!' repeated Giuseppa.

'Yes, Gianetto had hidden himself under that hayrick over there; but my little cousin showed me the trick. I shall tell his uncle the Corporal, and he will send him a fine present for his pains. And his name and yours shall be in the report that I send to the Public Prosecutor.'

'Curse,' said Mateo, very low.

They had come up to the soldiers. Gianetto was already laid on his litter, ready to start. When he saw Mateo with Gamba he smiled an odd smile; then, turning towards the door of the house, he spat on the threshold, and said:

‘The house of a traitor.’

Only a man ready to die would have dared to apply the name of traitor to Falcone. A good dagger thrust, that would leave no need of a second, would have instantly avenged the insult. But Mateo’s only movement was to put his hand to his forehead like a stunned man.

Fortunato had gone into the house on seeing the arrival of his father. He soon reappeared with a bowl of milk, which he presented with downcast eyes to Gianetto.

‘Keep off!’ shouted the bandit with a voice of thunder.

Then, turning to one of the *voltigeurs* :

‘Let’s have a drink, comrade,’ he said.

The soldier put his flask in his hands, and the bandit drank the water given him by a man with whom he had just been exchanging gunshots. Then he asked that his hands should be fastened crossed on his breast, instead of tied behind his back.

‘I like,’ said he, ‘to lie at my ease.’

They did their best to satisfy him ; then the adjutant gave the signal for the start, said ‘good-bye’ to Mateo, who did not answer, and went down at a smart pace towards the plain.

Ten minutes passed before Mateo opened his mouth. The child looked uneasily, now at his mother, and now at his father, who, leaning on his gun, considered him with an expression of concentrated rage.

'You begin well,' said Mateo at last, in a voice calm, but terrifying to those who knew the man.

'Father!' cried the child, coming nearer, with tears in his eyes, as if to throw himself at his knees.

But Mateo shouted at him :

'Out of my presence !'

And the child stopped short, and sobbed, motionless, a few steps from his father.

Giuseppa came up. She had just noticed the watch-chain, one end of which hung out of Fortunato's shirt.

'Who gave you that watch?' she asked sternly.

'My cousin, the adjutant.'

Falcone seized the watch, and, flinging it violently against a stone, broke it in a thousand pieces.

'Woman,' said he, 'is this child mine?'

The brown cheeks of Giuseppa became brick red.

'What are you saying, Mateo? Do you know to whom you are speaking?'

'Well, this child is the first of his race to be a traitor.'

The sobs and chokes of Fortunato redoubled, and Falcone kept his lynx eyes always fixed upon him. At last he struck the ground with the butt of his gun, then threw it across his shoulder, and took once more the path to the *mâquis*, shouting to Fortunato to follow him. The child obeyed.

Giuseppa ran after Mateo and caught him by the arm.

'He is your son,' she said in a trembling voice,

fixing her black eyes on her husband's as if to read what was passing in his soul.

'Leave me,' answered Mateo; 'I am his father.'

Giuseppa kissed her son and went weeping back into the cottage. She threw herself on her knees before an image of the Virgin, and prayed fervently. Meanwhile Falcone walked some two hundred paces along the path, and did not stop until he went down into a small ravine. He felt the earth with the butt of his gun, and found it soft and easy to dig. The place seemed suitable to his purpose.

'Fortunato, go up to that big rock.'

The child did as he was told, and then knelt.

'Say your prayers.'

'Father, my father, do not kill me.'

'Say your prayers!' repeated Mateo in a terrible voice.

The child, stammering and sobbing, recited the *Pater* and the *Credo*. The father responded *Amen* in a loud voice at the end of each prayer.

'Are those all the prayers you know?'

'Father, I know the *Ave Maria* too, and the litany my aunt taught me.'

'It is very long, but never mind.'

The child finished the litany in a stifled voice.

'Have you done?'

'O father, have mercy! forgive me! I will not do it again! I will beg my cousin the Corporal ever so hard that Gianetto may be pardoned!'

He was still speaking ; Mateo had cocked his gun, and took aim, saying :

‘ May God forgive you ! ’

The child made a desperate effort to get up, and embrace his father’s knees ; but he had not the time. Mateo fired, and Fortunato fell stone-dead.

Without throwing a glance at the corpse, Mateo took the path to his house, to get a spade for the digging of his son’s grave. He had only gone a few yards when he met Giuseppa, running, alarmed by the gunshot.

‘ What have you done ? ’ she cried.

‘ Justice.’

‘ Where is he ? ’

‘ In the ravine. I am going to bury him. He died a Christian ; I will have a mass sung for him. Let them tell my son-in-law, Tiodoro Bianchi, to come and live with us.’

THE TAKING OF THE REDOUBT

A SOLDIER of my acquaintance, who died of the fever in Greece some years ago, told me one day the story of his first engagement. His tale so struck me that I wrote it down from memory as soon as I had the time. Here it is:—

I joined my regiment on the 4th of September in the evening. I found the colonel in camp. He greeted me with some brusqueness at first; but, when he had read my letter of introduction from General B——, he changed his tone and gave me a few courteous words.

He presented me to my captain, at that very minute on his way back from a reconnoitre. The captain, whose acquaintance I had scarcely time to make, was a big dark man, with a hard, uncompromising face. He had been a private soldier, and had won his epaulettes and his cross on the field of battle. His voice, which was harsh and weak, made an odd contrast with his almost gigantic stature. They told me he owed this singular voice to a bullet that had gone through him at the battle of Jena.

When he heard that I had just come from the school at Fontainebleau, he made a face and said:

‘My lieutenant died yesterday . . .’

‘I understood that he meant, ‘You will have to replace him, and you are not fit for the job.’ A word of pique came to my lips, but I said nothing.

The moon rose behind the redoubt of Cheverino, two cannon-shots from our camp. She was large and ruddy, as she usually is when she rises. But that night she seemed to me of an extraordinary size. For an instant the redoubt stood out in black on the brilliant disc of the moon. It was like a volcano at the moment of eruption.

An old soldier standing near remarked on the colour of the moon.

‘She is very red,’ he said ; ‘that means we shall have to pay for it, this famous redoubt.’ I have always been superstitious, and the omen, at that of all moments, moved me. I lay down, but could not sleep. I got up, and walked for some time, watching the immense line of fires that topped the heights above the village of Cheverino.

. When I thought that the fresh sharp air of the night had sufficiently invigorated my blood, I came back to the fire ; I wrapped myself carefully in my cloak, and closed my eyes, hoping not to open them till dawn. But sleep was rigorously withheld. My thoughts took insensibly a melancholy colour. I told myself that I had not a friend among the hundred thousand men who covered the plain. If I were wounded, I should be in a hospital, carelessly treated by ignorant surgeons.

Everything I had heard of surgical operations came back into my head. My heart beat violently, and I arranged mechanically, as a kind of cuirass, the handkerchief and pocket-book I had on my breast. Weariness overwhelmed me, I grew drowsy continually, and continually some sinister idea came back to me still stronger, and woke me with a start.

However, fatigue prevailed, and reveille found me really asleep. We fell in, they called the roll, arms were piled again, and there were all the signs that we were going to spend a quiet day.

About three o'clock an aide-de-camp arrived, carrying a despatch. We were called to arms again; our skirmishers spread in open order on the plain, we slowly followed them, and, at the end of twenty minutes, saw all the Russian outposts fall back and re-enter the redoubt.

A battery of artillery had taken up a position on our right, another on our left, but they were both well in advance of us. They opened a lively fire on the enemy, who answered them briskly, and soon the redoubt of Cheverino became invisible under heavy clouds of smoke.

Our regiment was almost covered from the Russian fire by a ridge of earth. Their balls (of which we did not get many, for they shot in preference at our artillery) passed over our heads, or at most sent us earth and little stones.

As soon as we were given the order to advance, my

captain looked at me with an attention that made me stroke my juvenile moustache with the easiest air I could assume. Besides, I was not frightened, and the only fear I felt was lest people should think I was afraid. The harmless balls helped still further to strengthen me in my heroic calm. My self-respect told me I was really in danger, since at last I was under fire from a battery. I was delighted to be so much at my ease, and dreamed of the pleasure I should have in describing the taking of the Cheverino redoubt, in the salon of Madame de B——, rue de Provence.

The colonel passed before our company, and spoke to me: 'Eh, well, you are going to see stars in your *début*.'

I smiled in an altogether martial manner, wiping the sleeve of my coat, on which a ball, fallen thirty feet away, had flung a little dust.

It seemed that the Russians saw the ill success of their cannon-balls, for they changed them for shells, which could reach us more easily in the hollow where we were. A fair-sized splinter knocked off my shako and killed a man close to me.

'I congratulate you,' said the captain, as I regained my shako; 'you have paid your score for the day.' I knew this military superstition that the rule *non bis in idem* holds good on the field of battle as well as in a court of justice. I proudly readjusted my shako.

'That is an unceremonious way of making one salute,'

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said I, as gaily as I could. The feeble joke appeared excellent under the circumstances.

'I congratulate you,' answered the captain; 'you will not be touched again, and you will command your company this evening; for I know well that the oven is warming for me. Every time I have been wounded the officer next me has been touched by some spent bullet, and,' he added, in a voice low and almost ashamed, 'their names always began with a P.'

I was encouraged; many a man would have been the same; many a man would have been struck as I was by those prophetic words. Conscript as I was, I felt I could confide my feelings to no one, and that I should always appear coldly intrepid.

After half an hour the Russian fire sensibly weakened: we left our cover to march on the redoubt.

Our regiment was made up of three battalions. The second was charged with turning the redoubt from the side of the gorge; the other two were to make the assault. I was in the third battalion.

Going out from behind the kind of shoulder that had protected us, we were received with volleys of musketry that did not take much effect on our ranks. The whistling of the bullets surprised me; I often turned my head, which brought me some pleasantry from my comrades who were better accustomed to the noise.

'Taking all in all,' said I to myself, 'a battle is not such a terrible thing.'

We advanced at the double, with our skirmishers in front: all at once the Russians loosed three hurrahs, three distinct hurrahs, and then remained silent, and stopped firing.

'I do not like this silence,' said my captain; 'it bodes no good for us.'

I thought that our men were a little too noisy, and could not help making a secret comparison between their tumultuous clamour and the imposing silence of the enemy.

We quickly came to the foot of the redoubt; the barricades had been broken, and the earthworks knocked to pieces by our balls. The soldiers flung themselves on these fresh ruins with shouts of '*Vive l'Empereur!*' stronger than one would have expected from men who had already shouted so much.

I looked up, and never shall I forget the spectacle I saw. The greater part of the smoke had lifted, and stayed hanging like a dais twenty feet above the redoubt. Through a bluish mist one saw, behind their half-destroyed parapet, the Russian grenadiers, their weapons ready, immobile as statues. I think I see them still, each soldier with his left eye fixed on us, his right hidden by his lifted gun. In an embrasure, a few feet from us, a man with a linstock was close to a cannon.

I shivered, and thought my last hour was come.

'Now the ball is going to open,' cried my captain. 'Good-evening.'

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Those were the last words I heard him say.

A roll of drums sounded in the redoubt. I saw all the guns lowered. I shut my eyes and heard a terrific crash, followed by cries and groans. I opened my eyes, surprised to find myself still in the world. The redoubt was again enveloped in smoke. I was surrounded by wounded and dead. My captain was stretched at my feet: his head had been smashed by a ball, and I was covered with his brains and his blood. Of my whole company, only six men and I were left standing.

This carnage was followed by a moment of stupor. The colonel, putting his hat on the end of his sword, was the first man up the parapet, shouting, '*Vive l'Empereur!*' He was instantly followed by all the survivors. I have no clear recollection of what happened after that. We got into the redoubt, I do not know how. One fought hand to hand in the midst of a smoke so thick that one could not see oneself. I believe I struck, for my sabre was all bloody. At last I heard shouts of 'Victory!' and, the smoke clearing, saw the blood and the dead men that covered the ground of the redoubt. The cannon especially were buried under piles of corpses. About two hundred men in French uniform were standing in irregular groups, some loading their guns, others wiping their bayonets. There were eleven Russian prisoners with them.

The colonel had been knocked down covered with

blood on a broken ammunition box close to the gorge. Some soldiers were busy about him. I went up.

‘Where is the senior captain?’ he asked a sergeant.

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders in a manner sufficiently expressive.

‘And the senior lieutenant?’

‘Here is the gentleman who arrived yesterday,’ said the sergeant in a perfectly calm voice.

The colonel smiled bitterly.

‘Well,’ he said to me, ‘you are commander-in-chief. Be prompt in having the gorge of the redoubt fortified with these gun-carriages, for the enemy is in force; but General C—— is going to support you.’

‘Colonel,’ I said, ‘you are badly wounded?’

‘Done for, my dear fellow, but the redoubt is taken!’

TAMANGO

CAPTAIN LEDOUX was a good sailor. He had begun by being a simple seaman, and then assistant helmsman. At the battle of Trafalgar he had his left hand smashed by a splinter of wood ; he lost his hand, and was discharged with good certificates. Repose hardly suited him, and, when an opportunity of re-embarkation presented itself, he served as second lieutenant on board a privateer. The money he got from some prizes made it possible for him to buy books and study the theory of navigation, of whose practice he had already a perfect understanding. In time he became captain of a private lugger, with three guns and a crew of sixty men, and the coasting sailors of Jersey have not yet forgotten his exploits. The peace made him miserable : he had amassed a small fortune during the war, and had hoped to increase it at the expense of the English. He was obliged to offer his services to peaceable merchants ; and, since he had the reputation of a resolute and experienced man, he was readily entrusted with a ship. When the slave-trade was forbidden, and it was necessary, in order to carry it on, not only to

elude the vigilance of the French customs-officers, which was not very difficult, but also, a more risky affair, to escape the English cruisers, Captain Ledoux became a valuable man to the merchants in ebony.¹

Very different from most sailors who have languished, as he had, a long time in subordinate positions, he had not that profound horror of innovation, and that spirit of routine, that they too often carry into the higher ranks. On the contrary, Captain Ledoux had been the first to advise his owner to use iron tanks to hold water and keep it sweet. On his boat, the handcuffs and chains with which slave-ships are provided were made after a new system, and carefully varnished to protect them from rust. But what brought him most credit among the slave-merchants was the building, that he personally superintended, of a brig designed for the trade, a clean sailer, narrow, long like a ship of war, and able none the less to accommodate a very large number of blacks. He called her the *Esperance*. It was his idea that the 'tween decks, narrow and shut in as they were, should be only three feet four inches in height. He maintained that this size allowed slaves of a reasonable height to be comfortably seated; and what need have they of getting up?

'When they get to the colonies,' said Ledoux, 'they will be only too long on their feet.'

The negroes, arranged in two parallel lines, with their backs against the sides of the vessel, left an empty

¹ This was the name adopted by the traders.

space between their feet, used, in all other slave-ships, for moving about. Ledoux thought of placing other negroes in this space, lying at right angles to the rest. In this way his ship held ten more blacks than any other of the same tonnage. It would have been strictly possible to place yet more, but one must have some humanity, and leave a nigger at least a space five feet long and two broad in which to disport himself during a voyage of six weeks and more. 'For, after all,' said Ledoux to his owner, to justify this liberal allowance, 'the niggers are men like the whites.'

The *Esperance* left Nantes on a Friday, as superstitious people have since remarked. The inspectors, who made a scrupulous examination of the brig, did not discover six big cases full of chains, handcuffs, and those irons that are called, for some reason or other, 'bars of Justice.' Nor were they at all astonished at the enormous provision of water that the *Esperance* was to carry, although, according to her papers, she was only going as far as Senegal, to trade there in wood and ivory. The voyage is not a long one, it is true, but there is no harm in taking precautions. If one should be surprised by a calm, what would become of one without water?

The *Esperance*, then, sailed on a Friday, well fitted and equipped throughout. Ledoux would, perhaps, have liked masts a little more solid; however, he could not complain, since the building had been under his own direction. His voyage to the African coast was

fortunate in every way. He cast anchor in the river of Joale (I believe) at a time when the English cruisers were not watching that part of the coast. The native merchants came immediately on board. The moment could not have been more favourable. Tamango, a famous warrior and man-seller, had just brought a great quantity of slaves to the coast, and was getting rid of them cheaply, as a man who knew that it was in his power to re-stock the market as soon as his goods should become scarce.

Captain Ledoux went ashore and paid his call on Tamango. He found him with two of his wives, some lesser merchants and overseers, in a straw hut that had been hastily built for him. Tamango had dressed himself out to receive the white captain. He was clad in an old blue military tunic, still bearing the corporal's stripes; but on each shoulder hung two epaulettes fastened to the same button, flapping, one before and one behind. Since he had no shirt, and the tunic was a little short for a man of his height, a considerable strip of black skin, which looked like a large belt, appeared between the white facings of the tunic and his drawers of Guinea cloth. A big cavalry sabre was hung from a cord at his side, and he held in his hands a fine double-barrelled gun of English make. Thus equipped, the African warrior believed that he surpassed in elegance the most accomplished dandy in Paris or London.

Captain Ledoux observed him silently for some

time, while Tamango, throwing a chest like a grenadier on parade before a strange general, enjoyed the impression he thought he was making on the white man. Ledoux, after examining him like a connoisseur, turned to his second in command, and said :

‘There’s a rascal I should sell for a thousand crowns, if I could get him safe and sound to Martinique.’

They sat down, and a sailor who knew a little of the negro language served as interpreter. After the first polite compliments had been exchanged, a boy brought a basket of bottles of brandy. They drank, and the captain, to put Tamango in a good humour, made him a present of a pretty copper powder-flask decorated with a portrait of Napoleon in relief. When the present had been accepted with suitable gratitude, they left the hut and sat down in the shade before the brandy bottles. Tamango made a sign for the slaves he had to sell to be brought before them.

They appeared in a long string, their bodies bent with weariness and terror, each one with his neck in a six-foot fork, whose points were fastened with a wooden bar close behind his head. When they are to get on the move, one of the overseers takes the handle of the first slave’s fork on his shoulder ; this slave looks after the fork of the man immediately behind him ; the second carries the fork of the third slave ; and so on. When they are to halt, the leader of the file sticks the pointed handle of his fork in the ground, and the whole column comes to a stand. There is obviously no use

in thinking of escape by flight, when one carries a great stick six feet long fastened to one's neck.

The captain shrugged his shoulders as each slave, male or female, passed before him; he found the men weakly, the women too young or too old, and complained of the decay of the black race.

'It is degenerating in every way,' he would say; 'once things were very different. The women were five feet six inches tall, and four of the men could have turned the capstan of a frigate by themselves to lift the main anchor.'

However, in the midst of his criticism, he made a first choice of the sturdiest and most handsome blacks. He was willing to pay for these at the ordinary rates, but he demanded a great reduction on the others. Tamango, on his side, was looking after his interests, praising his merchandise, and speaking of the scarcity of men, and the perils of the trade. He finished by setting a price, I do not know what, on the slaves that the white captain wished to take on board.

As soon as the interpreter had put Tamango's proposition into French, Ledoux almost fell backwards with surprise and indignation; then, muttering some terrible oaths, he got up, as if to break off all treaty with so unreasonable a man. Then Tamango begged him to stay, and succeeded with difficulty in getting him to sit down again. Another bottle was opened, and the discussion recommenced. It was now the black's turn to find the white man's offers unreasonable

and absurd. For a long time they shouted, and argued, and drank prodigious quantities of brandy, but the brandy had very different effects on the two contracting parties. The more the Frenchman drank, the lower the prices he offered ; the more the African drank, the more he lessened his demands. In this way, at the end of the basket, they came to an agreement. Some cheap cotton, some powder, some flints, three casks of brandy, and fifty guns in bad repair, were given in exchange for one hundred and sixty slaves. The captain, in order to confirm the bargain, clapped his hand in that of the more than half-drunken black, and the slaves were instantly handed over to the French sailors, who hurried to remove their wooden forks, and to substitute collars and handcuffs of iron ; a good example of the superiority of European civilisation.

There still remained a score and a half of slaves ; they were children, old men, and sick women. The ship was full.

Tamango, who did not know what to do with this trash, offered to sell them to the captain at a bottle of brandy apiece. The offer was tempting. Ledoux remembered that at the representation of 'The Sicilian Vespers,' at Nantes, he had seen a good number of big fat men enter a pit that was already full, and yet succeed in finding sitting room, by virtue of the compressibility of the human body. He took the twenty slenderest slaves of the thirty.

Then Tamango asked only a glass of brandy apiece

for the ten who were left. Ledoux remembered that in public conveyances children only pay for and only occupy half places. He accordingly took three children, but declared that he had no mind to burden himself with a single other black. Tamango seeing that he had still seven slaves on his hands, took his gun, and aimed at the woman who came first: she was the mother of the three children.

‘Buy, or I kill her,’ he said to the white; ‘a little glass of brandy, or I fire.’

‘And what the devil do you want me to do with her?’ asked Ledoux.

Tamango fired, and the slave fell dead on the ground.

‘Another!’ cried Tamango, aiming at a broken-down old man; ‘a glass of brandy, or else . . .’

One of his wives pulled his arm aside, and the shot went at random. She had just recognised, in the old man her husband was about to kill, a *guru*, or magician, who had foretold that she was to be Queen.

Tamango, infuriated with the brandy, was beside himself when he saw his wishes opposed. He struck his wife roughly with the butt of his gun; then, turning to Ledoux:

‘See here,’ he said, ‘I give you this woman.’

She was pretty. Ledoux looked at her smiling, and took her by the hand.

‘I shall find a place to put her,’ said he.

The interpreter was a humane man. He gave Tamango a cardboard snuff-box, and asked for the six

slaves who were left. He freed them from their forks, and let them go where they thought fit. They immediately made off, some this way, some that, not knowing in the least how they were to get back to their country, two hundred leagues from the coast.

Meanwhile the captain said good-bye to Tamango, and busied himself in getting his cargo as quickly as possible on board. It was imprudent to stay long up river; the cruisers might reappear, and he meant to set sail the next day. As for Tamangô, he lay down on the grass in the shade, to sleep off the effects of the brandy.

When he awoke, the vessel was already under sail, and going down the river. Tamango, whose head was still muddled by the debauch of the day before, asked for his wife, Ayché. They told him she had had the misfortune to displease him, and that he had given her as a present to the white captain, who had taken her on board. Tamango, stupefied at this news, smote his head, then took his gun, and, since the river made several turns before emptying itself in the sea, ran by the shortest road to a little bay half a league from the mouth. There he hoped to find a canoe in which he could overtake the brig, whose voyage would be retarded by the twistings of the river. He was not mistaken; he had just time to throw himself into a canoe and join the slave-ship.

Ledoux was surprised to see him, and still more so to hear him ask for the return of his wife.

'A thing once given is not to be taken back,' he replied.

And he turned his back on him.

The black insisted, offering to give back some of the things he had had in exchange for the slaves. The captain broke into a laugh, and said that Ayché was a very good woman, and that he meant to keep her. At this poor Tamango wept floods of tears, and uttered cries of misery as piercing as those of a poor wretch under a surgical operation. One minute he was running about the deck calling for his beloved Ayché, and the next he was beating his head on the planks as if to kill himself. Unmoved throughout, the captain, pointing to the land, made signs that it was time for him to leave. Tamango persisted. He offered even his golden epaulettes, his gun, and his sabre. All was in vain.

During this discussion, the lieutenant of the *Esperance* said to the captain:

'We lost three slaves last night, so we have some room. Why not take this sturdy rogue, who is worth in himself alone more than the three who are dead?' Ledoux reflected that Tamango would sell for a good thousand crowns; that this voyage, which seemed likely to be very profitable, would probably be his last; and that, finally, since his fortune was made and he was giving up the slave-trade, it did not much matter to him whether he left a good or evil reputation on the coast of Guinea. Besides, there was absolutely no one on the shore, and the African warrior was entirely

at his mercy. All that had to be done was to remove his weapons ; for it would have been dangerous to lay a hand on him while they were still in his possession. Ledoux accordingly asked for his gun, as if to examine it, and make sure it was worth as much as the beautiful Ayché. In testing the triggers, he was careful to let the powder fall from the priming. The lieutenant, for his part, got possession of the sabre ; and, when Tamango had been thus disarmed, two strong sailors flung themselves upon him, knocked him down, and proceeded to bind him. The black's resistance was heroic. Recovering from his first surprise, he made a long struggle with the two sailors, in spite of the disadvantages of his position. Thanks to his prodigious strength, he succeeded in getting to his feet. With a blow of the fist he grounded the man who was holding him by the neck ; he left a bit of his coat in the hand of the other sailor, and rushed like a madman at the lieutenant to snatch away his sabre. The lieutenant struck him on the head with it, and gave him a large wound, though not very deep. Tamango fell a second time. They instantly bound him securely, hand and foot. While he was struggling, he uttered cries of rage, and flung himself about like a wild boar taken in the nets ; but, when he saw that all resistance was useless, he shut his eyes, and did not make another movement. His powerful, rapid breathing was the only sign that he was still alive.

'My word !' cried Captain Ledoux, 'the blacks he

sold will have a good laugh when they see him a slave in his turn. They will see by this there is a Providence above.'

Meanwhile poor Tamango was bleeding to death. The charitable interpreter, who had saved the lives of six slaves the day before, came up to him, bound his wound, and gave him a few words of consolation. I do not know what he could say to him. The black remained motionless as a corpse. Two sailors had to carry him below like a package, to the place that was to be his. For two days he would neither eat nor drink; he was scarcely seen to open his eyes. His comrades in captivity, lately his prisoners, saw his appearance in their midst with dull astonishment. Such was the fear with which he still inspired them, that not one of them dared to jeer at the misery of him who had caused their own.

Favoured by a good wind from the land, the vessel speedily slipped away from the African coast. Free already from anxiety about the English cruisers, the captain no longer thought of anything but the enormous profits awaiting him in the colonies towards which he was making his way. His ebony wood was keeping sound. No contagious diseases. Only twelve niggers, and they of the feeblest, had died from heat; a mere bagatelle. He took the precaution of making all his slaves come on deck every day, so that his human cargo should suffer as little as possible from the fatigues of the voyage. Turn by turn, a third of the

poor wretches had an hour in which to take in their provision of air for the whole day. A part of the crew, armed to the teeth, mounted guard over them for fear of a revolt; care was taken besides never entirely to remove their irons. Sometimes a sailor, who knew how to play the fiddle, regaled them with a concert. It was odd then to see all those black figures turn towards the musician, lose by degrees their expression of dull despair, burst into laughter, and (when their chains allowed them) clap their hands. Exercise is necessary for health; and so another of the salutary practices of Captain Ledoux was to set his slaves frequently dancing, as one makes horses prance, when they are on board ship for a long voyage.

‘Now then, my children, dance, be happy,’ thundered the captain, cracking an enormous coach-whip.

And immediately the poor blacks leapt and danced.

Tamango’s wound kept him below hatches for some time. He appeared at last on deck; and first, proudly lifting his head in the midst of the timorous crowd of slaves, he threw a glance, sad but calm, over the immense stretch of water surrounding the boat; then he lay down, or rather let himself fall on the deck, without even caring to arrange his irons so as to be as little uncomfortable as possible. Ledoux was seated on the quarter-deck, tranquilly smoking his pipe. Ayché, without irons, dressed in an elegant robe of blue cotton, her feet in pretty morocco-leather slippers,

was carrying a tray of liqueurs in her hand, ready to pour him out a drink. It was clear that she held a high position in the captain's service. A black, who detested Tamango, signed to him to look in that direction. Tamango turned, saw her, uttered a cry, and, leaping up, ran towards the quarter-deck before the sailors on guard could prevent so enormous a breach of naval discipline.

'Ayché!' he thundered, and Ayché screamed with terror. 'Do you believe there is no MAMA-JUMBO in the country of the white men?'

The sailors were already running up with lifted clubs; but Tamango folded his arms, and, as if indifferent, went quietly back to his place, while Ayché, bursting into tears, seemed petrified by the mysterious words.

The interpreter explained what was this terrible Mama-Jumbo, whose mere name produced such terror.

'It is the nigger's Bogey Man,' he said. 'When a husband is afraid lest his wife should do what plenty of wives do in France as well as in Africa, he threatens her with Mama-Jumbo. I have seen Mama-Jumbo myself, and fathomed the trick; but the blacks . . . the blacks are such fools they understand nothing. Imagine that one evening, while the women are amusing themselves with a dance, a *folgar*, as they call it in their gibberish, suddenly a strange music is heard, coming from a little wood, very thick and very dark. They see no one to make it; all

the musicians were hidden in the wood. There were reed flutes, and wooden tabours, *balafos*, and guitars made from the halves of gourds. They were all playing a tune to bring the devil on earth. The women no sooner hear that tune than they start trembling; they would make off, but their husbands hold them back: they know well what is coming next. All at once there comes out of the wood a great white figure as high as our topmast, with a head as big as a bushel measure, eyes as large as hawse-holes, and a mouth like the devil's, with fire inside. The thing walked slowly, slowly; and it never went more than half a cable's length from the wood. The women cried:

“Behold Mama-Jumbo!”

‘They bawled like oyster-women. Then their husbands said:

“Now then, you jades, tell us if you have behaved yourselves; if you lie, there is Mama-Jumbo to eat you all raw.”

‘There were some who were foolish enough to confess, and then their husbands beat them to a jelly.’

‘And so what was this white figure, this Mama-Jumbo?’ the captain asked.

‘Oh, it was a wag muffled up in a big white sheet, carrying, instead of a head, a hollowed pumpkin furnished with a lighted candle, on the end of a long pole. It was nothing more cunning than that, but it needs no great expense of cleverness to deceive the

blacks. With all that, the Mama-Jumbo is a good invention, and I wish my wife believed in it.'

'As for mine,' said Ledoux, 'if she is not frightened of Mama-Jumbo, she is afraid of Martin-Rod; and she knows, too, how I would give it her if she played me some trick. We are not long-suffering in the family of Ledoux, and although I have only one hand left, it still makes pretty good play with a rope's end. As for your joker down there, who talks of Mama-Jumbo, tell him to behave himself, and not frighten this little woman here, or I will have his back so flayed, that his hide will no longer be black, but as red as a raw beef-steak.'

With these words the captain went down to his cabin, summoned Ayché, and tried to console her: but neither caresses, nor even blows, for one loses patience at last, could bring the beautiful negress to reason; she wept floods of tears. The captain went on deck again in a bad temper, and scolded the officer of the watch over the manœuvre he was ordering at the time.

That night, when almost all the crew were fast asleep, the men of the watch heard first a low song, solemn, lugubrious, coming from the 'tween decks, and then a woman's scream, horribly piercing. Immediately afterwards the coarse voice of Captain Ledoux, swearing and threatening, and the noise of his terrible whip resounded throughout the ship. An instant later, all was silent again. The next day Tamango appeared on deck

with a scarred face, but an air as proud, as resolute as before.

Ayché had no sooner seen him than, leaving the quarter-deck, where she was sitting beside the captain, she ran swiftly to Tamango, knelt before him, and said in accents of utter despair :

‘Forgive me, Tamango, forgive me !’

Tamango watched her fixedly for a minute ; then, noticing that the interpreter was some way off :

‘A file !’ he said.

And he lay down on the deck, turning his back on Ayché. The captain scolded her sharply, even gave her a blow or two, and forbade her to speak to her ex-husband ; but he was far from suspecting the meaning of the short words they had exchanged, and asked no questions on the subject.

Meanwhile Tamango, shut up with the other slaves, exhorted them night and day to make a generous attempt to regain their liberty. He spoke to them of the small numbers of the white men, and pointed out the continually increasing carelessness of their guards ; then, without explaining himself exactly, he said that he would know how to take them back to their country, boasted his knowledge in the occult sciences, with which the blacks are much taken up, and threatened with the vengeance of the devil those who should refuse to help him in his scheme. In his harangues he used only the Berber dialect, known to the greater part of the slaves, but not understood by the inter-

preter. The reputation of the orator, the habit the slaves were in of fearing and obeying him, came marvelously to the aid of his eloquence, and the blacks begged him to fix a day for their deliverance long before he himself believed he was in a position to effect it. He replied vaguely to the conspirators that the time was not come, and that the devil, who was appearing to him in his dreams, had not yet warned him, but that they should hold themselves in readiness for the first signal. However, he lost no opportunity of experimenting on the watchfulness of his guards. On one occasion, a sailor, leaving his gun leaning on the parapet, was amusing himself by watching a troop of flying-fish that were following the vessel; Tamango took the gun and began to handle it, copying with grotesque gesture the movements he had seen made by soldiers at drill. The gun was taken from him after an instant; but he had learnt that he could touch a weapon without awaking immediate suspicion; and, when the time should come for making use of one, he would be a bold man who should try to wrest it from his hands.

One day Ayché threw him a biscuit, making him a signal that he alone understood. The biscuit contained a little file; on this instrument depended the success of the conspiracy. Tamango was very careful at first not to show the file to his companions; but, when night was come, he began to murmur unintelligible words that he accompanied with bizarre gestures.

He grew by degrees so excited as to cry aloud. To hear the varied intonations of his voice, one would have said he was engaged in a lively conversation with an invisible person. The slaves all trembled, not doubting but that the devil was at that very moment in the midst of them. Tamango put an end to the scene with a cry of joy.

‘Comrades,’ said he, ‘the spirit I have conjured up has at last given me what he had promised, and I have in my hand the instrument of our deliverance. Now you need nothing but a little courage to set yourselves at liberty.’

He made those who were near him touch the file, and the imposture, stupid as it was, found credence among men still stupider.

After long expectation the great day of vengeance and liberty arrived. The conspirators, bound to each other by a solemn oath, had settled their plan after mature deliberation. The most determined, with Tamango at their head, when it was their turn to go on deck, were to possess themselves of the weapons of the guards; others were to go to the captain’s cabin and get hold of the guns that were stored there. Those who had succeeded in filing their irons were to commence the attack; but, in spite of the stubborn work of many nights, the greater number of slaves were still unable to take an active part in the engagement. Accordingly, three sturdy blacks had been entrusted with the killing of the man who carried the manacle-

key in his pocket, after which they were to go instantly and free their chained companions.

On that day Captain Ledoux was in a delightful temper; contrary to his usual practice, he pardoned a ship's boy who had deserved a thrashing. He complimented the officer of the watch on his navigation, told the crew he was pleased with them, and announced that at Martinique, where they would shortly arrive, each man was to receive a bonus. All the sailors, full of agreeable ideas, were mentally planning the spending of this gratuity. They were thinking of brandy and the coloured women of Martinique, when Tamango and the other conspirators were made to come on deck.

They had been careful so to file their irons that they should not seem severed, and yet that the slightest effort should suffice to break them. Besides, they made such a jingling with them that any one who heard them would have said they were carrying a double weight. After taking breaths of air for some time, they joined hands and danced, while Tamango chanted the war-song of his family,¹ that he sang in other times before going into battle. When the dance had gone on for some time, Tamango, as if overcome by fatigue, lay down full length at the feet of a sailor who was carelessly leaning on the parapet of the ship; all the conspirators did the same. In this way each sailor was surrounded by several blacks.

All at once, as soon as he had noiselessly broken his

¹ Each nigger chief has his own.

irons, Tamango loosed a great shout that was to serve as a signal, seized the sailor who was close to him violently by the legs, upset him, and putting a foot on his stomach, wrested his gun from him, and made use of it to kill the officer of the watch. Simultaneously each sailor of the watch was assailed, disarmed, and instantly slaughtered. A war-cry rose throughout the ship. The boatswain, who had the key of the irons, was one of the first to fall. Then a crowd of blacks poured out on the decks. Those who could not find weapons seized the capstan bars, or the oars of the sloop. From that moment the crew of Europeans was lost. However, a few sailors rallied on the quarter-deck; but they lacked arms and resolution. Ledoux was still alive and had lost none of his courage. Observing that Tamango was the soul of the conspiracy, he thought that if he could kill him he could make quick work of his accomplices. He accordingly ran to meet him, sabre in hand, calling him with loud shouts. Tamango instantly rushed upon him. He held a gun by the end of the barrel, and was using it like a club. The two leaders met on one of the gangways, a narrow passage communicating between the fore-castle and the after-deck. Tamango struck the first blow. The white avoided it by a nimble movement of the body. The butt struck the deck, and broke, and the shock was so violent that the gun escaped from Tamango's hands. He was defenceless, and Ledoux, with a smile of diabolic joy, prepared to

run him through ; but Tamango was as agile as his country's panthers. He threw himself into his adversary's arms, and gripped the hand with which he was holding the sabre. The one struggled to retain the weapon, the other to wrest it away. In this furious wrestle both fell ; but the African was underneath. Undismayed, he squeezed his adversary with his full strength, and bit him in the throat with such violence that the blood spirted out as if under the teeth of a lion. The sabre slipped from the captain's weakening grip. Tamango seized it ; then, getting up, his mouth all bloody, he drove it again and again through his already half-dead enemy.

The victory was no longer in suspense. The few sailors who were left tried to beg pity from the rebels ; but all, even the interpreter, who had never done them any harm, were pitilessly massacred. The lieutenant died with honour. He had gone aft to one of those little cannon that turn on a pivot and are charged with grapeshot. He managed the gun with his left hand, and defended himself so well with a sword in his right that he brought round him a crowd of blacks. Then, pressing the trigger of the gun, he made a broad road paved with dead and dying, through the midst of the dense mass. An instant later he was cut to pieces.

When the corpse of the last white had been slashed and cut to pieces, and flung into the sea, the blacks, satiated with vengeance, looked up at the sails of the vessel, which, steadily filled by a fresh breeze, seemed

to be still in the service of their oppressors, and taking the conquerors, in spite of their triumph, towards the land of slavery.

'Then nothing has been done,' they thought bitterly. 'Will that great fetish of the white men be willing to take us back to our country, we, who have spilled the blood of his masters?'

Some said that Tamango would know how to make him obey. Tamango was instantly summoned with loud shouts.

He did not hurry to make his appearance. He was found standing in the poop cabin, resting one hand on the captain's bloody sabre, and absently offering the other to his wife Ayché, who was kissing it, kneeling before him. The joy of victory did not lessen a dark anxiety that was betrayed in his whole manner. Less clownish than the others, he better understood the difficulties of his position.

He appeared at last on deck, affecting a calm that he did not feel. Urged by a hundred confused voices to direct the course of the vessel, he went up to the helm with slow steps, as if to postpone for a little the moment that, for himself and for the others, was to decide the extent of his power.

In the whole vessel there was not one black, however stupid, who had not noticed the influence that a certain wheel and the box placed in front of it exercised on the movements of the ship; but there was always a great mystery for them in this mechanism.

Tamango examined the compass for a long time, moving his lips, as though he were reading the characters he saw traced there ; then he put his hand to his forehead and took the thoughtful attitude of a man making a mental calculation. All the blacks crowded round him, mouths gaping, eyes wide open, following his slightest gesture. At last, with the mixture of fear and hardihood that is given by ignorance, he gave a violent jerk to the steering wheel.

Like a generous courser rearing under the spur of an imprudent horseman, the good ship *Esperance* bounded over the waves at this unheard-of manœuvre. One would have said that in her indignation she wished to engulf herself and her ignorant pilot. The proper connection between the positions of the sails and the rudder being rudely broken, the vessel heeled over so violently that she seemed on the point of sinking. Her long yards were plunged in the sea. Many men were knocked down ; some fell overboard. Presently the ship rose proudly from the surge, as if to make one more fight with destruction. The wind redoubled its force, and, all at once, with a horrible noise, the two masts fell, broken a few feet above the deck, covering the ship with wreckage and a heavy network of ropes.

The horrified negroes fled below the hatches, shrieking with terror ; but, since the wind no longer found purchase, the vessel righted and abandoned herself to the gentle tossing of the waves. Then the more courageous of the blacks came again on the decks and

cleared them of the wreckage that encumbered them. Tamango remained motionless, resting his elbow on the binnacle, hiding his face in his folded arms. Ayché was with him, but dared not say a word to him. Little by little the blacks came up to them ; a murmur arose, which presently changed into a storm of reproaches and insults.

‘Traitor ! impostor !’ they cried, ‘you are the cause of all our misfortunes ; it was you who sold us to the white men, it was you who urged us to revolt against them. You had boasted to us of your knowledge, you had promised to take us back to our country. We believed you, fools that we were, and behold, we have all had a narrow escape from death because you offended the white man’s fetish.

Tamango proudly lifted his head, and the negroes about him shrank back afraid. He picked up two guns, signed to his wife to follow him, and walked towards the forepart of the vessel. There he made himself a rampart with empty casks and planks ; he settled himself in this species of entrenchment, from which protruded the menacing bayonets of his two guns. They left him in peace. Among the rebels, some were weeping ; others, raising their hands to heaven, invoked their fetishes and those of the white men ; some, on their knees before the compass, whose perpetual motion was a marvel to them, prayed to it to take them to their country ; some lay in gloomy dejection on the deck. In the midst of these despairing

men should be pictured women and children howling with fright, and a score of wounded begging the help that no one thought of giving them.

Suddenly a nigger appeared on the deck, his face radiant. He announced that he had just found the place where the white men kept their brandy; his joy and his manner were a sufficient proof that he had that moment tried it. This news suspended for the moment the poor wretches' cries. They ran to the storeroom and glutted themselves with liquor. An hour later they were to be seen leaping and laughing on the deck, abandoning themselves to all the extravagances of the most brutal drunkenness. Their dances and songs were accompanied by the groans and sobs of the wounded. In this way passed the rest of the day and all the night.

In the morning, on waking up, fresh despair. A great number of wounded had died during the night. The ship was surrounded by floating corpses. The sea was rough and the sky clouded. A council was held. Some novices in the magic art, who had not dared to speak of their knowledge before Tamango, offered their services one after another. Each vain attempt added to their discouragement. At last they spoke again of Tamango, who had not yet left his barricade. After all he was the wisest amongst them, and he alone could take them from the horrible situation in which he had placed them. An old man approached him with offers of peace. He begged him to come and give

his advice ; but Tamango, stern as Coriolanus, was deaf to his prayers. At night, in the midst of the disorder, he had provided himself with biscuits and salt meat. He seemed determined to live alone in his retreat.

There was still the brandy. That at least gives forgetfulness of the sea, slavery, and approaching death. One sleeps, and dreams of Africa, and sees the gum-tree forests, the straw-covered huts, and the baobabs, whose shade covers a whole village. The orgy of the day before began again. In this way many days went by. Their life was made up of shrieking and groaning and tearing their hair, and then getting drunk, and sleeping. Many died of drink ; some flung themselves in the sea, or stabbed themselves to death.

One morning Tamango left his stronghold, and came as far as the stump of the mainmast.

‘Slaves,’ said he, ‘the Spirit has appeared unto me in a dream, and revealed the means of taking you hence and bringing you back to your country. Your ingratitude should make me abandon you ; but I have pity on the cries of these women and children. I forgive you : listen to me.

All the blacks bent their heads respectfully, and gathered round him.

‘The whites,’ Tamango went on, ‘alone know the words of power that move these big houses of wood ; but we can guide as we will these light boats that are not unlike those of our own country.’

He pointed to the sloop and the other boats of the brig.

'Let us fill them with food, embark, and row with the wind; my Master and yours will make it blow towards our country.'

They believed him. Never was project more insane. Ignorant of the use of the compass, under an unfamiliar sky, he could do nothing but wander at random. According to his notions, he imagined that if he rowed straight ahead, he would reach at last some 'nd inhabited by black men, for the black men possess the earth, and the white men live in their ships. He had heard his mother say that.

Soon all was ready for the embarkation; but the sloop and one small boat were all that were fit for use. There was not enough room for the eighty negroes still alive. They had to abandon all the wounded and sick. The greater number of these asked them to kill them before leaving.

The two boats, launched with infinite difficulty, and laden beyond measure, left the ship in a choppy sea that threatened to swamp them every moment. The little boat got away first. Tamango and Ayché had taken their places in the sloop, which, heavier built and laden, lagged considerably behind. They could still hear the plaintive cries of some poor wretches left on board the brig, when a fair-sized wave took the sloop broadside on, and filled her with water. The little boat saw their disaster, and her rowers redoubled their efforts,

for fear of having to pick up some of the wrecked. Almost all in the sloop were drowned. A dozen only were able to regain the vessel. Of this number were Tamango and Ayché. When the sun set, they saw the small boat disappear below the horizon; but no one knows what became of it.

Why should I weary the reader with a disgusting description of the tortures of hunger? About twenty persons in a small space, now tossed by a stormy sea, now roasted by a burning sun, quarrel day by day over the scanty remains of their provisions. Each scrap of biscuit costs a battle, and the weak die, not because the strong kill them, but because they leave them to their death. At the end of a few days there was no longer a living thing on the brig *Esperance* but Tamango and his wife Ayché.

One night the sea was rough, the wind blew, and the darkness was such that one could not see the prow of the vessel from the poop. Ayché was lying on a mattress in the captain's cabin, and Tamango was sitting at her feet. For a long time there had been silence between them.

'Tamango,' said Ayché at last, 'all that you suffer, you suffer because of me.'

'I do not suffer,' he answered bluntly, and threw on the mattress beside his wife, the half biscuit that remained to him.

'Keep it for yourself,' she said, gently refusing the

biscuit; 'I am not hungry any more. Besides, why eat? Is not my hour come?'

Tamango got up without reply, went tottering on deck, and sat down at the foot of a broken mast. With his head bowed on his breast, he whistled the song of his family. Suddenly a great shout sounded through the noise of wind and sea. A light appeared. He heard other shouts, and a big black vessel slipped swiftly by his own; so near that the yards passed over his head. He saw only two faces lit by a lantern hung from a mast. These men shouted once again before their ship, carried along by the wind, disappeared into the darkness. Undoubtedly the look-out men had seen the wrecked vessel; but the storm prevented them from tacking about. An instant later Tamango saw the flash of a gun and heard the noise of the explosion; then he saw the flash of another, but did not hear any noise; after that he saw nothing more. The next day there was not a sail on the horizon. Tamango lay down on his mattress and closed his eyes. His wife Ayché had died that night.

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I do not know how long afterwards an English frigate, the *Bellona*, sighted a ship, dismasted and apparently deserted by her crew. When a sloop was sent alongside, there was found a dead negress and a nigger so fleshless and emaciated that he was like a mummy. He was unconscious, but had still a breath of life. The surgeon took him in hand and nursed

him, and when the *Bellona* reached 'Kingstown, Tamango was in perfect health. They asked him for his story. He told them what he knew of it. The planters of the island wanted him hung as a rebel negro; but the governor, who was a humane man, interested himself in him, and found his actions justifiable, since after all he had only exerted the legitimate right of self-defence; and since those he had killed were only Frenchmen. He was treated as they treat niggers taken on a confiscated slave-ship. They gave him his liberty, that is to say, set him to work for the Government; but he had six sous a day and his food. He was a very fine-looking man. The colonel of the 75th saw him, and took him to make a cymbal-player of him in the regimental band. He learnt a little English; but he scarcely spoke. Instead he drank rum and grog in inordinate quantities. He died in hospital of inflammation of the lungs.

THE GAME OF BACKGAMMON

THE motionless sails hung glued against the masts ; the sea was smooth as a mirror ; the heat was stifling, the calm hopeless.

On a sea-voyage the means of entertainment at command of a vessel's guests are soon exhausted. People know each other too well after passing four months together in a wooden house of a hundred and twenty feet in length. When you see the first lieutenant approaching, you know at once that he will talk to you of Rio de Janeiro, where he has just been ; then of the famous Essling Bridge that he saw built by the Marine Guards of whom he was one. At the end of a fortnight, you know even the expressions he affects, the punctuations of his phrases, the different intonations of his voice. When has he ever neglected a melancholy pause after the first occurrence in his tale of the words 'The Emperor' . . . ? 'If you had seen him then !!!' (three points of exclamation) he invariably adds. And the episode of the trumpeter's horse, and the cannon-ball that ricocheted and carried away a cartridge-case with seven thousand five hundred francs worth of gold

and jewels, etc., etc. !—The second lieutenant is a great politician ; he comments every day on the last number of the *Constitutionnel* that he brought away with him from Brest ; or, if he leave the sublimities of politics for a descent to literature, will regale you with the plot of the last vaudeville he saw played. Great God ! . . . The Marine Commissioner had a very interesting story. How he delighted you the first time he described his escape from the hulks of Cadiz ! But, at the twentieth repetition, upon my honour, it was unbearable. And the ensigns, and the midshipmen ! The memory of their conversations makes the hair rise on my head. The captain is usually the least tiresome person on board. In his quality of autocrat he is in a state of secret hostility against his whole staff ; he annoys, and sometimes is oppressive ; but there is a certain pleasure in cursing at him. If he has a passion for scolding his subordinates, they have the pleasure of seeing their superior look ridiculous, and that is a consolation.

On the vessel in which I had embarked the officers were the best men in the world, all good fellows, friendly as brothers, but each one more tedious than the last. The captain was the mildest of men, and (an exception) no busybody. It was always with regret that he exerted his absolute authority. None the less the voyage seemed long to me, and especially this calm which overtook us when only a few days from sight of land . . . !

One day after dinner, that our enforced idleness had

made us protract as long as was humanly possible, we were all assembled on the deck watching the monotonous but always majestic spectacle of a sunset over the sea. Some were smoking, others reading, for the twentieth time, one of the thirty volumes of our dreary library; all were yawning till the tears came. An ensign, seated beside me, was amusing himself with all the gravity befitting a serious business, by dropping point downwards on the deck the dirk usually carried by marine officers in undress uniform. It was an amusement of sorts, and it needed some skill to make the point stick quite perpendicularly in the wood. Wishing to imitate the ensign, and having no dirk of my own, I wanted to borrow the captain's, but he refused me. He was oddly fond of the weapon, and it would have annoyed him to see it serve for so futile an amusement. The dirk had once belonged to a brave officer who had unfortunately died in the last war. . . . I guessed that a story was to follow, and was not mistaken. The captain began without waiting to be pressed; as for the officers about us, since each one of them knew Lieutenant Roger's misfortunes by heart, they made an immediate and prudent retreat. Here is something like the captain's tale:—

Roger, when I met him, was my senior by three years; he was a lieutenant, I an ensign. I assure you he was one of the best officers in our corps; good-hearted too, witty, well educated, talented—in a word, a delightful young man. He was, unfortunately, a

little proud and sensitive ; this was due, I think, to the fact that he was illegitimate, and that he feared lest his birth should lose him respect in society ; but, to tell the truth, of all his faults, the greatest was a violent, and continual desire of standing first wherever he happened to be. His father, whom he had never seen, made him an allowance that would have been more than sufficient for his needs, if Roger had not been generosity itself. Everything he had was at the disposal of his friends. When he had just touched his quarter's money, he would say to any one who went to see him with a sad and careworn face : ' Well, comrade, and what is the matter with you ? You don't seem able to make much of a noise when you slap your pockets ; come now, here is my purse, take what you want, and come and have dinner with me.'

There came to Brest a young and very pretty actress called Gabrielle, who was not long in making her conquests among the naval and military officers. She was not a regular beauty, but she had a figure, fine eyes, a little foot, and a fairly saucy way with her ; and all that is very pleasing when one is in the latitude of twenty to twenty-five. It was said too that she was the most capricious creature of her sex, and her manner of playing did not give the lie to her reputation. One day she would play entrancingly, and one would have called her a *comédienne* of the first order ; the next, in the same piece, she would be cold, insensible, repeating her words like a child saying its catechism. What

especially interested us young men was an anecdote current about her. It appeared that she had been kept in great magnificence in Paris by a senator who, as they say, was mad on her. One day this man put his hat on in her presence ; she asked him to take it off, and even complained that he was lacking in respect for her. The senator laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and said, settling himself in a chair : 'At least I can be at ease in the house of a woman I pay.' The blow of a porter, delivered by the white hand of Gabrielle, instantly paid him for his reply, and sent his hat to the other side of the room. Thenceforward complete rupture. Bankers and generals had made considerable offers to the lady ; but she had refused them all, and become an actress, in order, as she put it, to live in independence.

When Roger saw her and heard the story he decided that she was made for him, and, with the rather brutal frankness of which we sailors are accused, he took these means of showing her how deeply he was smitten by her charms. He bought the most beautiful and rarest flowers that he could find at Brest, made a bouquet of them that he tied with a fine pink ribbon, and very carefully arranged in the knot a roll of twenty-five napoleons ; it was all he possessed at the moment. I remember I went in the wings with him during an interval. He made Gabrielle a very short compliment on the grace with which she wore her dress, offered her the bouquet, and asked if he might

come and see her at her house. All this was said in three words.

So long as Gabrielle only saw the flowers, and the handsome young man who presented them, she smiled on him, accompanying her smile with one of the most gracious of bows; but when she had the bouquet in her hands, and felt the weight of the gold, her face changed more swiftly than the sea lifted by a tropical hurricane; and certainly she was scarcely less malicious, for she threw the bouquet and the napoleons with all her strength at the head of my poor friend, who carried the marks on his face for over a week. The manager's bell sounded, and Gabrielle went on and played at random.

Roger picked up his bouquet and his roll of money with a very abashed air, went to a café to offer the bouquet (without the money) to the girl behind the bar, and tried, in drinking punch, to forget his cruel lady. He did not succeed; and, in spite of the annoyance he felt at being unable to show himself with his black eye, he became madly amorous of the choleric Gabrielle. He wrote her twenty letters a day, and what letters! submissive, tender, respectful, letters one could have sent to a princess. The first were sent back to him unopened; the rest received no reply. Roger, however, kept up some hope, until we found that the orange-seller of the theatre was wrapping up his oranges in Roger's love-letters, given him, with refined malice, by Gabrielle. This was a

terrible blow to our friend's pride. However, his passion did not weaken. He spoke of demanding the actress in marriage, and when told that the Minister of Marine would never give his consent, he declared he would blow out his brains.

While things were so, it happened that the officers of a line regiment, in garrison at Brest, wanted Gabrielle to repeat a vaudeville couplet, which she refused from pure caprice. The officers and the actress were both so obstinate that the former hissed till the curtain was lowered, and the latter left the place. You know what the pit is like in a garrison town. It was agreed between the officers that the next day and the days following the culprit should be hissed without mercy, and that she should not be allowed to play a single part until she had apologised with sufficient humility to expiate her crime. Roger had not been present at this performance ; but he learnt the same evening of the scandal that had set the whole theatre in an uproar, and so of the projects of vengeance plotted for the morrow. His decision was instantly made.

The next day, when Gabrielle appeared, hoots and hisses enough to split the ears came from the officers' benches. Roger, who had placed himself purposely quite close to the brawlers, stood up and addressed the noisiest in terms so outrageous that all their anger was instantly turned upon himself. Then, with great sang-froid, he took his note-book from his pocket, and wrote down the names that were shouted to him from

all sides; he would have made appointments to do battle with the whole regiment, if a great number of naval officers had not interfered from *esprit de corps* and drawn challenges from the greater part of his adversaries. The tumult was truly terrific.

The whole garrison was confined for several days; but, when we were again at liberty, there was a terrible account to settle. There were threescore of us on the field. Roger alone fought with three officers successively; he killed one of them, and grievously wounded the other two, without receiving a scratch. I was less fortunate: a cursed lieutenant, who had been a fencing-master, gave me a great sword-thrust in the chest, from which I nearly died. That duel, or rather battle, was a fine spectacle, I assure you. The navy had the advantage throughout, and the regiment was obliged to leave Brest.

You may well think that our superior officers did not forget the author of the quarrel. For fifteen days there was a sentinel at his door.

When he was no longer under arrest, I left the hospital and went to see him. What was my surprise, on entering his quarters, to see him seated at lunch *tête-à-tête* with Gabrielle. They looked as if they had had for some time a perfect understanding. Already they were calling each other thou, and drinking out of the same glass. Roger presented me to his mistress as his best friend, and told her how I had been wounded in the species of skirmish whose first cause

had been herself. That brought me a kiss from the fair lady. This girl had altogether martial inclinations.

They spent three months together, perfectly happy, not separated for a moment. Gabrielle seemed madly in love with him, and Roger avowed that he had not known what love was before knowing Gabrielle.

A Dutch frigate came into the harbour. The officers gave us a dinner. We drank freely of all sorts of wine; and, when the table had been cleared, not knowing what to do, for these gentlemen spoke very bad French, we began to play. The Dutchmen seemed to have plenty of money; and their first lieutenant especially wished to play for stakes so high that not one of us cared to have a game with him. Roger, who did not usually play, thought it his business, this being so, to sustain the honour of his country. He played accordingly, and agreed to whatever the Dutch lieutenant proposed. He won at first, then lost. After some alternations of winning and losing, they separated without advantage on either side. We dined the Dutch officers in return. We played again. Roger and the lieutenant took up their battle. In short, during several days, they made appointments at the café or on board, trying all sorts of games, mostly backgammon, and always increasing their stakes, so that they came to be playing for twenty-five napoleons a game. It was a huge sum for poor officers like us: more than two months' pay! At the end of a week Roger had lost all the money he

possessed, and three or four thousand francs borrowed right and left.

You are right in suspecting that Roger and Gabrielle had ended by setting up a common household and a common purse; that is to say, Roger, who had just touched a big share of prize-money, had contributed ten or twenty times as much as the actress. However, he always considered that this sum belonged principally to his mistress, and he had only kept fifty napoleons for his personal expenses. He had had, none the less, to use this reserve in order to go on playing. Gabrielle did not make the slightest protest.

The household wealth went the same way as his pocket-money. Soon Roger was reduced to playing for his last twenty-five napoleons. He applied himself horribly; and the game was long and well fought. There came a moment when Roger, holding the dice-box, had but one chance to win; I think he needed the six four. The night was advanced. An officer who had watched their play for a long time had ended by falling asleep in a chair. The Dutchman was tired and sleepy; besides he had drunk a great deal of punch. Roger alone was well awake, and a prey to the most violent despair. He trembled as he threw the dice. He threw them so roughly on the board that the shock brought a candle to the floor. The Dutchman turned first towards the candle, that had just covered his new trousers with wax, and then looked at the dice. They showed six and four.

Roger, pale as death, took the twenty-five napoleons. They went on playing. The luck became favourable to my unfortunate friend, who, however, made mistake after mistake, and played as if he wished to lose. The Dutch lieutenant grew wild, doubled, and tenfold increased the stakes: always he lost. I think I see him still; a big, phlegmatic blonde, with a face that seemed made of wax. He rose at last, after losing forty thousand francs, that he paid without his face betraying the slightest emotion.

Roger said:

‘What we have done this evening does not count, you were half asleep; I do not want your money.’

‘You are joking,’ replied the stolid Dutchman; ‘I played very well, but the dice have been against me. I am sure of being able to beat you always, and give you four holes (48 points). Good-night!’

And he left him.

We learnt the next day that, made desperate by his losses, he had blown out his brains in his cabin, after drinking a bowl of punch.

The forty thousand francs won by Roger were spread on a table, and Gabrielle contemplated them with a smile of satisfaction.

‘Behold us quite rich,’ said she; ‘what shall we do with all this money?’

Roger said nothing in reply; he seemed stupefied since the Dutchman’s death.

‘We must do a thousand mad things,’ Gabrielle con-

tinued; 'money so easily gained must be spent in the same fashion. Let us buy a carriage and look down on the Maritime Prefect and his wife. I would like to have diamonds and Cashmeres. Ask for leave of absence, and let us go to Paris; here we shall never come to the end of such a lot of money.'

She stopped to look at Roger, who, with his eyes fixed on the floor, resting his head in his hands, had not heard her, and seemed to be turning over in his mind the most sinister ideas.

'What the devil is the matter with you, Roger?' she cried, putting a hand on his shoulder. 'I believe you are sulky with me; I cannot get a word from you.'

'I am very unhappy,' he said at last with a stifled sigh.

'Unhappy! God forgive me, you are not feeling remorseful over plucking that fat *mynheer*?'

He lifted his head and looked at her with haggard eyes.

'What does it matter?' she pursued, 'what does it matter that he took the thing tragically and blew out what few brains he had? I do not pity players who lose; and his money is certainly better in our hands than in his own; he would have spent it in drinking and smoking, while we, we are going to commit a thousand extravagances, each one more elegant than the one before.'

Roger walked up and down the room, his head bowed on his breast, his eyes half shut and filled with

tears. You would have pitied him if you had seen him.

'Do you know,' said Gabrielle, 'that any one who did not know your romantic sensibilities might well believe you had cheated?'

'And if that were the truth?' he cried in a hollow voice, stopping before her.

'Bah!' she answered, smiling, 'you are not clever enough to cheat at play.'

'Yes, I cheated, Gabrielle; I cheated, like the wretch I am.'

She knew from his emotion that what he said was only too true: she sat down on a sofa, and stayed some time without speaking.

'I would rather,' she said at last in a voice deeply moved, 'I would rather you had killed ten men than cheated at play.'

There was a mortal silence for half an hour. The two of them were seated on the same sofa, and did not look at each other a single time. Roger rose first, and said 'Good-night' to her, in a fairly calm voice.

'Good-night,' she replied, drily and coldly.

Roger told me afterwards that he would have killed himself that very day, if he had not feared that our comrades would guess the reason of his suicide. He did not wish his memory sullied.

The next day Gabrielle was as gay as usual; you would have said she had already forgotten the confidences of the night before. As for Roger, he had become

sombre, fanciful, morose ; he scarcely left his room, avoided his friends, and often spent whole days without saying a word to his mistress. I attributed his unhappiness to an honourable but excessive sensibility, and I made several attempts to console him, but he drily repulsed me, affecting a great indifference towards his unfortunate partner. One day he even made a violent attack on the Dutch nation, and wanted to persuade me that there was not a single respectable man in Holland. Secretly, however, he tried to find out the family of the Dutch lieutenant ; but no one could give him any information about them.

Six weeks after that unhappy game of backgammon, Roger found a note in Gabrielle's room, written by a midshipman, who seemed to be thanking her for favours she had shown him. Gabrielle was untidiness itself, and the note in question had been left by her upon her mantelpiece. I do not know if she had been unfaithful, but Roger thought so, and his rage was terrific. His love and a remnant of pride were the only sentiments that could still attach him to life, and the stronger of them was about to be thus suddenly destroyed. He overwhelmed the proud actress with insults, and, violent as he was, I do not know how he kept himself from striking her.

'Doubtless,' he said, 'this puppy has given you plenty of money? It is the only thing you care for, and you would grant your favours to the dirtiest common sailor, provided he could pay for them.'

'Why not?' the actress coldly replied. 'Yes: I would take pay from a sailor, but . . . *I would not steal from him.*'

Roger uttered a cry of rage. He drew his dagger, trembling, and for a moment looked with wild eyes at Gabrielle; then, pulling himself together, he threw the weapon at his feet, and left the room so as not to yield to the temptation that obsessed him.

The same evening I passed very late by his lodgings, and seeing a light in his windows, I went in to borrow a book from him. I found him very busy writing. He did not disturb himself, and seemed scarcely to perceive my presence in his room. I sat down by his desk and observed his features: they were so altered that any other than I would have had difficulty in recognising him. Suddenly I saw on the desk a letter already sealed and addressed to myself. I instantly opened it. Roger told me that he was about to put an end to his days, and entrusted me with various commissions. While I read, he went on writing without taking any notice of me; he was making his farewells to Gabrielle. . . . You can guess my astonishment, and what I had to say to him, overwhelmed as I was by his resolve.

'What, you mean to kill yourself, you who are so happy?'

'My friend,' said he, sealing his letter, 'you know nothing; you do not know me; I am a rogue: I am so despicable that a prostitute insults me; and I am so

sensible of my baseness that I have not the strength to fight against it.'

Then he told me the story of the game of backgammon, and all that you know already. As I listened, I was at least as moved as he; I did not know what to say to him; I gripped his hands, I had tears in my eyes, but I could not speak. At last I had the idea of suggesting that he could not reproach himself with having voluntarily been the Dutchman's undoing, and that after all he had made him lose by his . . . cheating . . . only twenty-five napoleons.

'Then,' he cried, with bitter irony, 'I am a little thief and not a great one. And, with all my ambition, to be no more than a pickpocket.'

And he shouted with laughter.

I wept.

Suddenly the door opened; a woman came in and threw herself in his arms; it was Gabrielle.

'Forgive me,' she cried, straining him to herself. 'Forgive me. I know well I love no one but you. I love you better now than if you had not done the thing for which you reproach yourself. If you like, I will steal; I have already stolen. . . . Yes, I have stolen, I stole a gold watch. . . . What worse could one do?'

Roger shook his head with an air of incredulity; but his forehead seemed to lighten.

'No, my poor child,' he said, gently repulsing her, 'there is no help for it; I must kill myself. I suffer too much; I cannot bear up against my misery.'

‘Eh, well! if you mean to die, Roger, I shall die with you. What is life to me without you! I am brave, I have fired guns; I will kill myself just like any one else. Besides I have played in tragedy, I am in the habit of doing it.’ She had tears in her eyes when she began, but this last idea made her laugh, and Roger himself smiled. ‘You laugh, my officer,’ she cried, clapping her hands and kissing him; ‘you will not kill yourself!’

And she went on kissing him, now weeping, now laughing, now swearing like a sailor; for she was not one of those women who are frightened by a coarse word.

Meanwhile I had got possession of Roger’s pistols and dirk, and I said to him:

‘My dear Roger, you have a mistress and a friend who love you. Believe me, you can yet find some happiness in this world.’ I went out after embracing him, and left him alone with Gabrielle.

I think we should only have succeeded in postponing his sombre plans, if he had not received a billet from the Minister, appointing him first lieutenant on board a vessel that was to go cruising in the Indies, after passing through the English squadron blockading the port. It was a risky business. I made him see that it was better to die nobly from an English bullet than to put an inglorious end to his days without doing any good to his country. He promised to live. He distributed half the forty thousand francs among disabled seamen,

and the widows and children of sailors. He gave the rest to Gabrielle, who first swore only to use the money in good works. She had a real intention of keeping her word, poor girl; but her enthusiasms were of short duration. I learnt afterwards that she gave some thousands of francs to the poor. She bought chifcons with the rest.

We embarked, Roger and I, on a fine frigate, *La Galatée*; our men were brave, well drilled, well disciplined; but our commander was an ignoramus who thought himself a Jean Bart, because he swore better than an army captain, because he murdered the French language, and because he had never studied the theory of his profession, whose practice he understood sufficiently badly. However, luck was good to him at first. We got happily off the roads, thanks to a breeze that compelled the blockading squadron to take to the open sea, and we began our cruise by burning an English corvette and one of the Company's vessels off the coast of Portugal.

We sailed slowly towards the Indian seas, set back by contrary winds and the bad navigation of our captain, whose lack of skill added to the dangers of our cruise. Now chased by superior strengths, now pursuing merchant vessels, we did not pass a single day without some new adventure. But neither the hazardous life we were living, nor the troubles of the frigate's routine that fell to his share, could distract Roger from the melancholy thoughts that pursued him without respite.

He, who was once the most zealous and brilliant officer in our port, now contented himself with the mere performance of his duty. As soon as his work was done he shut himself up in his cabin, without books and without paper; he spent whole hours lying in his bunk, and the poor wretch could not sleep.

One day, observing his dejection, I bethought myself of saying to him:

'Great Heavens, my dear fellow, you are grieving over a small matter. You have tricked a fat Dutchman out of twenty-five napoleons; well, and you have remorse enough for a million. Now tell me, when you were the lover of the Prefect's wife at —, were you remorseful then? Yet she was worth more than twenty-five napoleons.'

He turned over on his mattress without answering.

I went on:

'After all, your crime, since you say it was a crime, had an honourable motive, and was due to a lofty soul.'

He turned his head and looked furiously at me.

'Yes, for anyhow, if you had lost, what would have become of Gabrielle? Poor girl, she would have sold her last shirt for you. . . . If you had lost she would have been reduced to misery. . . . It was for her, for love, that you cheated. There are men who kill for love . . . who kill themselves. . . . You, my dear Roger, did more. For a man of our kind there is more courage in stealing, to put it clearly, than in suicide.'

'Perhaps now,' said the captain, breaking off in his story, 'I seem absurd to you. I assure you that in that moment my friendship for Roger gave me an eloquence I do not possess to-day; and, devil take it if I did not speak in good faith, speaking so to him, and if I did not believe all I said. Ah! I was young then!'

'My friend,' he said, seeming to make a great effort to command himself, 'you think me better than I am. I am a low down rogue. When I cheated that Dutchman, I thought only of getting twenty-five napoleons, that was all. I did not think of Gabrielle, and that is why I scorn myself: . . . For me to value my honour at less than twenty-five napoleons! What abasement! Yes; I should be happy if I could say, "I stole to save Gabrielle from misery." . . . No! . . . No! I did not think of her. I was not a lover at that moment. . . . I was a gambler. . . . I was a thief. . . . I stole money to have it myself . . . and that deed has so brutalised and debased me that now I have no longer courage or love. . . . I live, and I no longer think of Gabrielle. . . . I am a done man.'

He seemed so wretched that if he had asked me for my pistols to kill himself, I believe I should have given them him.

A certain Friday—day of ill omen—we sighted a big English frigate, the *Alceste*, who gave chase to us. She carried fifty-eight guns, and we had only eight-and-thirty. We hoisted all sail to escape her; but her

speed was greater than ours, and she gained on us every moment; it was clear that before night we should be forced into an unequal combat. Our captain called Roger to his cabin, where they were a good quarter of an hour consulting together. Roger came up on deck again, took me by the arm, and led me aside.

‘In two hours from now,’ he said, ‘the engagement will begin; that brave man who is trotting up and down the quarter-deck has lost his head. There were two courses open to him; the first, the more honourable, was to let the enemy catch us up, and then to tackle her vigorously, throwing a hundred sturdy rascals* aboard her; the other course, not bad, but rather cowardly, was to lighten ourselves by throwing some of our cannon into the sea. Then we could have closely hugged the African coast that we shall sight over there to larboard. The English, for fear of running aground, would have been forced to let us escape; but our——captain is neither a coward nor a hero; he is going to let himself be destroyed from afar by cannon-shot, and, after some hours of battle, will honourably lower his flag. So much the worse for you; the hulks of Portsmouth await you. As for me, I have no intention of seeing them.’

‘Perhaps,’ I said, ‘our first shots will do such damage to the enemy that she will be obliged to give up the chase.’

‘Listen; I do not mean to be a prisoner, I want to have myself killed; it is time that I should make an

end of things. If by bad luck I am only wounded, give me your word that you will throw me into the sea. That is the proper death-bed for a good sailor like me.'

'What madness,' I cried, 'and what sort of a job are you giving me?'

'You will be fulfilling the duty of a good friend. You know that I must die. You should remember, I only consented not to kill myself, in the hope of being killed. Come, promise me this: if you refuse, I am going to ask the favour from the boatswain, who will not.'

After reflecting a little, I said:

'I give you my word to do what you want, only if you are wounded to death, without hope of recovery. In that case, I agree to spare you your sufferings.'

'I shall be wounded to death, or killed.'

He offered me his hand, and I gripped it firmly. He was calmer after that, and indeed his face shone with a certain martial gaiety.

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon the enemy's bow guns began to make play in our rigging. We furled some of our sails; we presented our broadside to the *Alceste*, and kept up a steady fire to which the English vigorously replied. After about an hour's fighting, our captain, who did nothing at the right moment, wanted to try and board. But we had already many dead and wounded, and the rest of our crew had lost their keenness; finally, we had suffered sorely in our rigging, and our masts were badly damaged. At

the moment when we spread sail to come up to the English ship our mainmast, with no longer anything to hold it, fell with a horrible crash. The *Alceste* profited by the confusion into which this accident instantly threw us. She came up by our poop, giving us her whole broadside at half the range of a pistol; she raked our unlucky frigate from stern to stem, and we were only able to reply with two small guns. At this moment I was close to Roger, who was busy having the shrouds cut that still held the fallen mast. I felt him forcibly grip my arm; I turned round and saw him knocked over on the deck, and covered with blood. He had just received a charge of grapeshot in the stomach.

The captain ran to him.

'What is to be done, Lieutenant?' he cried.

'We must nail our flag to the stump of the mast, and scuttle the ship.'

The captain left him at once, not finding this advice very much to his taste.

'Come,' said Roger, 'remember your promise.'

'This is nothing,' I said. 'You can recover from it.'

'Throw me overboard,' he cried, cursing horribly, and seizing me by the skirts of my coat; 'you can see that I cannot recover; throw me in the sea; I do not want to see our flag struck.'

Two sailors came up to carry him to the cockpit.

'To your guns, you rogues,' he shouted; 'load with grapeshot, and aim at the deck. And you, if you

do not keep your word, I curse you, and I hold you the most cowardly, and the vilest of all men !'

His wound was certainly mortal. I saw the captain call a midshipman, and command him to strike our colours.

'Give me a handshake,' I said to Roger.

At the very moment when our flag was lowered——

'Captain, a whale to the larboard,' an ensign interrupted, running up.

'A whale?' cried the captain, transported with joy, leaving his tale where it was. 'Sharp now, lower the long-boat! lower the yawl! lower all the long-boats! Harpoons, ropes, etc., etc.'

I was unable to learn how poor Lieutenant Roger died.

THE ETRUSCAN VASE

AUGUSTE SAINT-CLAIR was not popular in what is called Society; principally because he only tried to please those who pleased him. He sought them out, and fled the others. Besides, he was absent-minded and indolent. One evening, as he was leaving the Théâtre Italien, the Marquise A—— asked him how Mademoiselle Sontag had sung. 'Yes, madame,' replied Saint-Clair, smiling pleasantly and thinking of something quite different. It was impossible to attribute this ridiculous reply to timidity; for he spoke to a great lord, to a great man, or even to a fashionable woman, with the same aplomb with which he would have entertained an equal. The Marquise decided that Saint-Clair was a prodigy of impertinence and stupidity.

Madame B—— asked him to dinner one Monday. She talked a great deal to him; and, as he left the house, he declared he had never met a more delightful woman. Now Madame B—— was in the habit of collecting wit for a month at other people's houses, and spending it at her own in a single evening. Saint-

Clair saw her again on the Thursday of the same week. This time he was a little bored. A third visit decided him never to show himself again in her drawing-room. Madame B—— declared that Saint-Clair was a young man with no manners, and of the worst form.

He had been born with a tender and loving heart ; but, at an age when impressions that last for a lifetime are too easily taken, his too expansive sensibility had made him the butt of his comrades. He was proud, ambitious ; he held to his opinions with childlike tenacity. From that time he studied to hide all the outward signs of what he regarded as an unworthy weakness. He achieved his end ; but his victory cost him dear. He could hide from others the feelings of his too sensitive soul, but in imprisoning them in himself, he made them a hundred times more cruel. In Society he won the sad reputation of an indifferent and careless man ; and in solitude his restless imagination made torments for him, the more frightful in that he would confide them to nobody.

It is true that it is difficult to find a friend. Difficult ! Is it possible ? Have two men existed who did not hide a secret from each other ? Saint-Clair scarcely believed in friendship, and the fact was obvious. The young people of Society found him cold and reserved. He never asked them for their secrets ; and for them, all his thoughts and most of his actions were hidden in mystery. The French love to talk of themselves ; so that Saint-Clair was, in spite of himself,

the depository of plenty of confidences. His friends—and the word means the people he saw twice a week—complained of his distrust of them ; it is a fact that the man who, unasked, shares his secret with us, is usually offended if he does not learn our own. People think there should be reciprocity in indiscretion.

‘He is buttoned up to the chin,’ said one day the handsome Major Alphonse de Thémincs. ‘I could never put the slightest trust in that devil of a Saint-Clair.’

‘I think him something of a Jesuit,’ replied Jules Lambert. ‘Some one told me on his word of honour he had twice met him coming out of Saint-Sulpice. No one knows what he is thinking. I can never be at ease with him.’ •

They separated. Alphonse met Saint-Clair on the Boulevard Italien walking along with bent head, blind to everybody. Alphonse stopped him, took him by the arm, and before they had reached the Rue de la Paix, had told him the whole story of his amours with Madame —, whose husband was so jealous and so brutal.

The same evening Jules Lambert lost his money at cards. He went and danced. While dancing, he elbowed a man who, having also lost all his money, was in a very bad temper. The result was an exchange of words, and arrangements for a meeting. Jules begged Saint-Clair to be his second, and on the same occasion borrowed money from him, which he has so far forgotten to repay.

After all, Saint-Clair was genial enough. His faults harmed nobody but himself. He was obliging, often delightful, scarcely ever a bore. He had travelled much, read much, and only spoke of his travels and his reading when pressed. Besides, he was big, and well made; his face was noble and intellectual; it was almost always too grave, but his smile was open and full of kindness.

I was forgetting an important point. Saint-Clair was attentive to all women, and sought their conversation more than that of men. Did he love? It was difficult to say. Only, if love did touch this cold being, it was known that the pretty Countess Mathilde de Coursy was the woman he preferred. She was a young widow at whose house he was a regular visitor. There were the following data from which to conclude their intimacy: first, the almost ceremonious politeness of Saint-Clair towards the Countess, and *vice versa*; secondly, his foible of never pronouncing her name in public—or, if he were forced to speak of her, never with the slightest praise; thirdly, before Saint-Clair had been introduced to her, he had been a passionate lover of music, and the Countess had a similar fondness for painting. Since they had met their tastes had changed. Lastly, when the Countess had been at a watering-place the year before, Saint-Clair had set off six days after her.

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My duty as historian compels me to declare that one

night in the month of July, a few minutes before dawn, the park-gate of a country-house opened, and a man came out, with all the precautions of a thief afraid of being surprised. The country-house belonged to Madame de Coursy, and the man was Saint-Clair. A woman wrapped in a pelisse accompanied him as far as the gate and leaned through it to see him the longer, as he went off down the path under the park wall. Saint-Clair stopped, looked circumspectly about him, and made a sign with his hand for the woman to go in. In the brightness of the summer night he could distinguish her pale face still motionless in the same place. He retraced his steps, came up to her, and took her tenderly in his arms. He wanted to make her promise to go in ; but he had still a hundred things to say to her. Their talk had lasted ten minutes when they heard the voice of a peasant going out to work in the fields. A kiss was taken and returned, the gate was closed, and Saint-Clair, with one bound, was at the end of the path.

He followed a road that seemed well known to him. Sometimes he almost leapt for joy, and ran, striking the bushes with his cane ; sometimes he stopped or walked slowly, looking at the sky, tinting now with purple in the east. Indeed any one who had seen him would have taken him for a lunatic delighted to have broken from his cage. After half an hour's walk he was at the door of a lonely little house he had rented for the season. He unlocked the door and went in,

threw himself on a big sofa, and there, with eyes fixed and lips curved in a gentle smile, gave himself up to thoughts and day-dreams. His imagination brought him none but ideas of happiness. 'How happy I am!' he kept saying to himself every moment. 'At last I have met a heart that understands my own! . . . Yes, I have found my ideal. . . . I have at the same time a *friend* and a mistress. . . . What character! . . . What passion of soul! . . . No, she has loved no one before me. . . .' Soon, since vanity slips always into the affairs of this world, 'she is the most beautiful woman in Paris,' he thought. And his imagination went over all her charms at once. 'She has chosen me from all. . . . She had the flower of Society for admirers. That Colonel of Hussars, so handsome, so brave—and not too much of a fop . . . that young author who makes such pretty water-colours, and plays "proverbs" so well. . . . That Russian Lovelace who was through the Balkan Campaign and served under Diébitch . . . above all, Camille T——, with his undoubted wit, his fine manners, and a handsome sabrecut on his forehead . . . she has shown the door to the lot of them. And I . . .!' Then came his refrain: 'How happy I am! How happy I am!' And he got up and opened the window, unable to breathe; alternately he walked up and down, and then lay upon his sofa.

Happy and unhappy lovers are almost equally dull. One of my friends, who was often in one or other case,

*found no other way of getting a listener, than to give me an excellent luncheon, during which he was free to talk of his loves; but it was an absolute condition that the conversation should be changed after the coffee.

Since I cannot give a lunch to all my readers, I will spare them the amorous musings of Saint-Clair. Besides, one cannot live for ever in the clouds. Saint-Clair was tired; he yawned, stretched his arms, and saw that it was full daylight; he had to think of sleeping. When he woke, he saw from his watch that he had scarcely time to dress and run up to Paris, where he had been invited to a luncheon-dinner with several young fellows of his acquaintance.

Another bottle of champagne had just been uncorked; I leave the reader to decide how many had already been drunk. Let it suffice him to know that the moment had arrived, which comes pretty early at a bachelor luncheon, when everybody wants to speak at the same time, and when the strong heads begin to grow anxious about the weak.

'I wish,' said Alphonse de Thémînes, who never lost an opportunity of speaking of England, 'I wish it were the fashion in Paris, as in London, for each man to call a toast to his mistress. In that way, we should really know whose are the sighs of our friend Saint-Clair.' As he spoke he filled his own glass and those of his neighbours.

Saint-Clair, a little embarrassed, was about to reply ;⁴ but Jules Lambert was before him.

'I strongly approve of the custom,' said he, 'and I adopt it.' He raised his glass : 'To all the milliners of Paris ! I except only those over thirty, the one-eyed, the one-legged, etc.'

'Hurrah ! Hurrah !' shouted the young Anglophiles.

Saint-Clair stood up, his glass in his hand.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'my heart is not so comprehensive as that of our friend Jules, but it is more constant. And there is the more merit in my constancy in that I have been separated for a long time from the lady of my thoughts. I am sure you will approve my choice, even if you are not already my rivals. To Judith Pasta, gentlemen ! May we soon see once again the first *tragédienne* of Europe !'

Thémines wanted to object to this toast, but the applause prevented him. Saint-Clair, having parried the thrust, thought himself quit of the business for the day.

The talk turned on the theatre. Dramatic criticism served as a means of transition to politics. From the Duke of Wellington they passed to English horses, and, from English horses to women, by a chain of ideas easy to follow, since young men find, first a fine horse, and secondly a pretty mistress, the two possessions most to be desired.

Then they discussed the methods of obtaining these desirable objects. Horses are bought, and one also

buys women; but we do not speak of that kind. Saint-Clair, after modestly pleading his lack of experience in the delicate subject, observed that the first step towards pleasing a woman was to be singular, and different from the others. But was there a general formula for singularity? He did not think so.

‘According to your view,’ said Jules, ‘a lame man or a hunchback are more likely to please than a straight fellow built like everybody else?’

‘You push things rather far,’ Saint-Clair replied; ‘but I accept, if necessary, all the consequences of my proposition. For instance, if I were a hunchback, I should not blow my brains out, and I should decide to make conquests. In the first place, I should pay my addresses to two kinds of women only, to those of a real sensibility, or to those, and there are plenty of them, who pretend to an original character, eccentrics, as they say in England. I should paint for the former the horror of my position, the cruelty of nature towards me; I should try to set them pitying my lot, and contrive to let them suspect me capable of a passionate love. I should kill a rival in a duel, and poison myself with a feeble dose of laudanum. After a few months they would no longer notice my hump, and then it would be my business to watch for the first access of tenderness. As for the women who pretend to originality, their conquest is easy. You have only to persuade them that it is a firmly established rule that no hunchback can have a love affair, and they

will be instantly anxious to prove it by an exception.'

'What a Don Juan!' cried Jules.

'Let us break our legs, gentlemen,' said Colonel Beaujeu, 'since we have the ill luck not to be born with humpbacks!'

'I agree absolutely with Saint-Clair,' said Hector Roquantin, who was only three and a half feet high. 'One sees every day the most beautiful and fashionable women giving themselves to men whom you fine fellows would never suspect.'

'Hector, get up, I beg you, and ring for wine,' said Thémînes with the most natural air imaginable.

The dwarf rose, and every one smiled, remembering the fable of the fox who had lost his tail.

'As for me,' said Thémînes, taking up the conversation, 'the longer I live, the clearer I see that passable looks,' and he threw a complacent glance in the mirror that was opposite him, 'passable looks, and taste in dress, make the great singularity that conquers the most cruel'; and he flipped a breadcrumb from the lapel of his coat.

'Bah!' cried the dwarf, 'a handsome face and clothes by Staub win you the women you keep for eight days and are bored by at the second meeting. But for love, for what is called love, something else is needed. . . . You want——'

'See here,' interrupted Thémînes, 'would you like a decisive example? You all knew Massigny, and you

know what sort of a man he was. The manners of an English stable-boy, and the conversation of his horse. But he was as handsome as Adonis, and wore his cravat like Brummel. Taking him altogether, he was the biggest bore I have ever known.'

'He tried to kill me with dulness,' said Colonel Beaujeu. 'Imagine: -I had to travel two hundred leagues with him.'

'Did you know,' asked Saint-Clair, 'that he caused the death of that poor Richard Thornton whom you knew?'

'But surely,' replied Jules, 'he was killed by brigands near Fondi?'

'Certainly; but you shall see that Massigny was at least an accomplice in the crime. Several travellers, Thornton among them, had arranged to go to Naples, all together, for fear of the brigands. Massigny wanted to join the party. As soon as Thornton knew it, he went on, for horror, I suppose, at the idea of having to spend some days with him. He set out alone, and you know the rest.'

'Thornton was right,' said Thémynes; 'of two deaths he chose the easier. Any one would have done the same in his place.' He paused, and continued: 'You grant me then that Massigny was the most tedious man on earth?'

'Granted!' There was a shout of acclamation.

'Let us not reduce anybody to despair,' said Jules; 'let us make an exception of . . . especially when he is expounding his political plans.'

'You will also grant me,' pursued Thémînes, 'that Madame de Coursy is a woman of brains, if ever there was one.'

There was a moment's silence. Saint-Clair bent his head, and thought that all eyes were upon him.

'Who questions it?' he said at last, still leaning over his plate, apparently examining with great interest the flowers painted on the porcelain.

'I maintain,' said Jules, raising his voice, 'I maintain that she is one of the three most delightful women in Paris.'

'I knew her husband,' said the Colonel. 'He often showed me charming letters from his wife.'

'Auguste,' put in Hector Roquântin, 'you must introduce me to the Countess. They say you count for something there.'

'At the end of the autumn,' murmured Saint-Clair, 'when she comes back to Paris. . . . I . . . I think she does not entertain in the country.'

'Will you listen to me?' cried Thémînes.

There was silence again. Saint-Clair fidgeted on his chair like a prisoner in a Court of Justice.

'You had not seen the Countess three years ago, Saint-Clair; you were then in Germany,' Alphonse de Thémînes went on with relentless calm. 'You can have no idea of what she was in those days; beautiful, fresh as a rose, lively too, and gay as a butterfly. Well, among her numerous admirers, who do you think was honoured with her favour? Massigny! The stupidest

of men, and the dullest, turned the head of the cleverest of women. Do you think a hunchback could have done as much? No, believe me, have a handsome face and a good tailor, and be bold.'

Saint-Clair was in an atrocious position. He was going to give the narrator a formal contradiction; but fear of compromising the Countess held him back. He would have liked to say something in her favour; but his tongue was frozen. His lips trembled with rage, and he searched his head in vain for some roundabout means of starting a quarrel.

'What!' cried Jules with surprise, 'Madame de Coursy gave herself to Massigny! Frailty, thy name is woman!'

'The reputation of a woman is a thing of such small importance!' said Saint-Clair, in a dry, scornful voice. 'One may pull it to pieces to make a little sport, and——'

As he spoke, he remembered with horror a certain Etruscan vase that he had seen a hundred times on the Countess's mantelpiece in Paris. He knew it had been a present from Massigny on his return from Italy; and, damning circumstance! the vase had been brought from Paris to the country. Every evening, when she took off her bouquet, Mathilde placed it in the Etruscan vase.

The words died on his lips: he saw no longer but one thing, thought no longer but of one thing—the Etruscan vase.

'A fine proof!' a critic will say. 'To think of suspecting one's mistress for so small a thing as that!'

Have you been in love, master Critic?

Thémines was in too good a temper to be offended at the tone Saint-Clair had taken in speaking to him.

He replied lightly, with an air of good fellowship:

'I only repeat what the world said. It was taken as truth while you were in Germany. But I scarcely know Madame de Coursy; it is eighteen months since I went to her house. It is possible that people were mistaken, and that Massigny was telling me a yarn. To return to what we were considering: I should be none the less right, even if the example I have just quoted should prove to be false. You all know that France's most brilliant woman, she whose works——'

The door opened, and Théodore Neville came in. He had just returned from Egypt.

'Théodore! Back so soon!' He was overwhelmed with questions.

'Have you brought back a real Turkish costume?' asked Thémines. 'Have you an Arab horse, and an Egyptian groom?'

'What sort of a man is the Pasha?' asked Jules. 'When will he make himself independent? Have you seen heads cut off with single sabre blows?'

‘And the dancing girls!’ said Roquantin. ‘Are Cairo women beautiful?’

‘Did you see General L——?’ asked Colonel Beaujeu. ‘How has he organised the Pasha’s army? Did Colonel C—— give you a sword for me?’

‘And the Pyramids? And the cataracts of the Nile? And the statue of Memnon? Ibrahim Pasha? etc.’ All spoke at once; Saint-Clair thought of nothing but the Etruscan vase.

Théodore seated himself cross-legged, for he had taken to the habit in Egypt and had not been able to lose it in France, waited till the questioners had tired themselves out, and spoke as follows, so fast as not to be easily interrupted :

‘The Pyramids! I tell you, they are a regular humbug. They are not nearly so high as one thinks. The Minster at Strasbourg is only four metres lower. I am full up with antiquities. Don’t speak of them. The mere sight of a hieroglyph would make me faint. There are so many travellers who busy themselves with these things! My object was to study the appearances and manners of all that bizarre crowd that fills the streets of Alexandria and Cairo—Turks, Bedouins, Copts, Fellahs, Megrabis. I made some hurried notes when I was in quarantine. What an infamy that is! I hope none of you believe in contagion. As for me, I calmly smoked my pipe in the midst of three hundred plague-stricken people. Ah! Colonel, you would see some fine cavalry there, well

mounted. I will show you some superb weapons I brought back. I have a *djerid* that belonged to the famous Mourad Bey. Colonel, I have a *yataghan* for you, and a *khandjar* for Auguste. You shall see my *metchla*, my *burnous*, my *haïck*. Do you know, I could have brought some women back if I had wanted. Ibrahim Pasha sent so many from Greece, that they are to be had for the asking . . . but on account of my mother. . . . I talked a lot with the Pasha. He is a clever man, my word, and no bigot. You would scarcely believe how learned he is in our affairs. I tell you he knows of the slightest mysteries of our Cabinet. I drew from his conversation the most precious information as to the state of the parties in France. . . . At present he is much busied with statistics. He subscribes to all our newspapers. Do you know, he is a determined Bonapartist! He talks of nothing but Napoleon. "Ah," he said to me, "what a great man was Bounabardo!" *Bounabardo*, that is their name for Bonaparte.

'Giourdina, that is to say, Jordan,' murmured Thémines beneath his breath.

'At first,' Théodore went on, 'Mohammed Ali was very reserved with me. You know all Turks are very mistrustful. He took me for a spy, damme! or a Jesuit. He has a horror of Jesuits. But, after a visit or two, he saw that I was a traveller, unprejudiced, and curious to learn on the spot the customs, manners, and politics of the Orient. Then he unbent,

and spoke to me with an open heart. At my last audience, which was the third he gave me, I took the liberty of saying, "I do not understand why your Highness does not make himself independent of the Porte." "My God!" said he, "I should like to; but I am afraid that the Liberal papers, which govern everything in your country, would not support me when once I had proclaimed the independence of Egypt." He is a handsome old man, with a fine white beard and never a laugh. He gave me some excellent preserves; but, of all I gave him, what pleased him most was the collection of uniforms of the Imperial Guard, by Charlet.'

'Is the Pasha romantic?' asked Thémînes.

'He bothers himself little with books; but you know that Arabian literature is wholly romantic. They have a poet called Melek Ayatalfous-Ebn-Esraf, who recently published some *Meditations* beside which those of Lamartine would seem to be classical prose. On my arrival in Cairo, I hired a teacher of Arabic, with whom I set myself to read the Koran. Although I had only a few lessons I learnt enough to understand the sublime beauties of the Prophet's style, and to realise how bad are all our translations. Look, would you like to see Arabic writing? This word in gold letters is *Allah*, that is to say, God.'

He showed as he spoke a very dirty letter that he had taken from a purse of perfumed silk.

'How long did you stay in Egypt?' asked Thémînes.

‘Six weeks.’

And the traveller went on, describing everything, from cedar to hyssop.

Saint-Clair went out almost immediately after his arrival, and took the road to his country-house. The impetuous gallop of his horse prevented him from following out his ideas. But he knew vaguely that his happiness in this world had been destroyed for ever, and that he could blame nothing for it but a dead man and an Etruscan vase.

Arriving home, he threw himself on the sofa where, the night before, he had made that lingering and delicious analysis of his happiness. The idea he had most lovingly caressed had been that his mistress was not a woman like another, that she had not loved, and could never love, but him alone. And now this beautiful dream disappeared before the mournful, cruel reality. ‘I possess a fine woman; that is all. She is clever. Then she is the more to blame, for being able to love Massigny! . . . It is true, she loves me now . . . with all her soul . . . as she can love. To be loved like Massigny! . . . She has submitted to my attentions, my whims, my importunities. But I have been mistaken. There was no sympathy between our hearts. Massigny or me, it is all one to her. He is handsome, she loves him for his good looks. I sometimes amuse her. “Well, we will love Saint-Clair,” she says to herself, “since the other is dead. And if Saint-Clair dies, or grows wearisome, we shall see.”’

I firmly believe the devil watches invisible by an unhappy wretch so torturing himself. It is an amusing sight for the enemy of mankind, and when the victim feels his wounds are closing, Satan is there to open them again.

Saint-Clair thought he heard a voice that murmured in his ears,

‘ . . . *L’honneur singulier*
D’être le successeur. . . .’

He sat up and looked wildly about him. How happy he would have been to find some one in his room. He would undoubtedly have torn him to pieces.

The clock struck eight. The Countess expected him at half past. What if he were to miss the appointment! ‘Indeed, why see Massigny’s mistress again?’ He lay down again on the sofa, and closed his eyes. ‘I want to sleep,’ he said. He lay still for half a minute, and then jumped to his feet and ran to the clock to see how the time was going. ‘How I wish it were half-past eight,’ he thought, ‘then it would be too late to set out.’ In his heart, he did not feel he had the courage to stay at home; he wanted a pretext. He would have been glad to be very ill. He walked up and down in his room, sat down, took a book, but could not read a syllable. He set himself before his piano, and had not the energy to open it. He whistled, looked at the clouds,

and wanted to count the poplars before his windows. Finally he returned to consult the clock, and saw that he had not succeeded in passing three minutes. 'I cannot help loving her,' he said, grinding his teeth and stamping his foot. 'She rules me, and I am her slave, as Massigny was before me. Ah well, wretched fellow, obey, since you have not the heart to break a chain you hate !' -

He took his hat and went hurriedly out.

When we are carried away by a passion, we find some consolation for our self-esteem, in contemplating our weakness from the height of our pride. 'It is true, I am feeble,' one says, 'but if I wished !'

He went leisurely up the path that led to the park-gate, and from a long way off saw a white figure that showed against the deep colour of the trees. She fluttered a handkerchief in her hand, as if to signal to him. His heart beat violently, and his knees trembled ; he had not the strength to speak, and had become so timid that he feared lest the Countess should read his ill-humour in his face.

He took the hand she offered him, kissed her forehead, because she threw herself in his arms, and followed her to her rooms, mute, stifling with difficulty the sighs that seemed ready to burst his chest.

A single candle lit the Countess's boudoir. They sat down. Saint-Clair noticed his friend's coiffure ; a single rose in her hair. He had brought her the day before a fine English engraving, after Lesly's

'Duchess of Portland' (her hair is dressed in this way), and had said but these words, 'I like that simple rose better than all your elaborate coiffures.' He did not like jewelry, and thought like that Lord who brutally said: 'With decked-out women and caparisoned horses, the devil himself would have nothing to do.'

Last night, playing with a pearl necklace belonging to the Countess (for he always wanted something in his hands while talking), he had said: 'Jewels are only good to hide defects. You, Mathilde, are too pretty to wear* them.' This evening, the Countess, who remembered his lightest words, had put off rings, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. He noticed footgear first in a woman's dress, and, like many men, he was a little mad on this point. A heavy shower had fallen before sundown. The grass was still drenched; yet the Countess had walked across the wet lawn in silk stockings and black satin slippers. . . . What if she were to be ill?

'She loves me,' said Saint-Clair to himself.

And he sighed over his folly, and looked at Mathilde, smiling in spite of himself, divided between his ill-humour and the pleasure of seeing a pretty woman trying to please him by all those little nothings that lovers hold so valuable.

As for the Countess, her radiant face expressed a mixture of love and playful mischief that made her still more lovable. She took something that was in a

Japanese lacquer box, and offering her little hand closed, hiding the thing it held.

'The other evening,' she said, 'I broke your watch. Here it is, mended.'

She gave him the watch, and looked at him tenderly, mischievously, biting her lower lip, as if to keep from laughing. Great God, but how beautiful her teeth were! How they shone white on the vivid red of her lips! (A man looks very foolish when he takes coldly a pretty woman's coaxings.)

Saint-Clair thanked her, took the watch, and was going to put it in his pocket.

'Look now,' she went on, 'open it, and see if it is properly mended. You who are so learned, and have been to the Polytechnic School, ought to see that.'

'I did not learn very much there,' said Saint-Clair.

And he absently opened the watch-case. What was his surprise! A miniature portrait of Madame de Coursy had been painted on the inside of the case. How could he sulk further? His forehead lightened. He thought no more of Massigny; he remembered only that he was with a charming woman and that this woman adored him.

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'The lark, that harbinger of dawn,' began to sing, and long strips of pale light furrowed the eastern clouds. It was the hour when Romeo said farewell to Juliet; the classic parting hour of lovers.

Saint-Clair was standing by a mantelpiece, the key of

the park in his hand, his eyes fixed attentively on the Etruscan vase of which we have already spoken. He still felt spiteful towards it, in the bottom of his heart. But he was in a good-humour, and the very simple idea that Thémînes might have lied began to come into his head. While the Countess, who meant to accompany him as far as the park-gate, was wrapping a shawl round her head, he lightly struck the odious vase with the key, gradually increasing the force of the blows, until it seemed likely he would soon be making it fly to pieces.

‘Oh! “Take care! Take care!” cried Mathilde, ‘you are going to break my beautiful Etruscan vase!’

And she snatched the key from his hands.

Saint-Clair was very dissatisfied, but patient. He turned his back on the mantelpiece, so as not to succumb to the temptation, and, opening his watch, set himself to examine the portrait he had just been given.

‘Who is the painter?’ he asked.

‘Monsieur R——. Massigny introduced him to me. (Massigny discovered after his journey to Rome that he had an exquisite taste for the Fine Arts, and became the Mæcenas of all the young artists.) Really, I think the portrait is like me, though a little flattering.’

Saint-Clair would have liked to hurl the watch against the wall, which would have made mending a difficult matter. He restrained himself, however, and put it in

his pocket ; then, observing that it was already day, he begged Mathilde not to accompany him, crossed the park with long strides, and in a moment was alone in the fields.

‘Massigny ! Massigny !’ he cried with concentrated rage, ‘shall I always be meeting you ! . . . Doubtless the painter who made the portrait, painted another for Massigny ! . . . Fool that I was ! I believed for a moment that I was loved with a passion like my own . . . and that because she dresses her hair with a rose, and wears no jewels. . . . She has a cabinet full of them. . . . Massigny, who only saw the dress of women, was so fond of jewels ! Yes, she is good-natured, it must be admitted. She knows how to accommodate herself to the tastes of her lovers. Curse ! I would a hundred times rather she were a courtesan, and sold herself for money. Then at least I should be able to believe that she loves me, since she is my mistress, and I do not pay her.’

Presently a still more painful idea occurred to him. In a few weeks the Countess would be out of mourning. Saint-Clair was to marry her as soon as her year of widowhood should be over. He had promised. Promised ? No. He had never spoken of it. But that had been his intention, and the Countess had known it. For him, that was as good as an oath. Yesterday he would have given a throne to hasten the moment when he should be able publicly to acknowledge his affection ; now, he trembled at the bare

idea of uniting his lot with that of Massigny's old mistress.

'And yet, I owe it to her,' he said, 'and it shall be. No doubt she thought, poor woman, that I knew of her old intrigue. They say it was public property. And then, too, she does not know me. . . . She cannot understand me. She thinks I only love her as Massigny loved her.'

Thén, not without pride, he said:

'For three months she has made me the happiest of men. That happiness is well worth the sacrifice of my whole life.'

He did not go to bed, but rode all morning in the woods. In a pathway of the wood of Verrières, he saw a man on a fine English horse who called him by name from a distance and came instantly up to him. It was Alphonse de Thémynes. To one in Saint-Clair's state of mind solitude was particularly agreeable; and the meeting with Thémynes turned his ill-humour into choking rage. Thémynes either did not notice it, or else took a roguish pleasure in provoking him. He talked, laughed and joked, without noticing that he met with no response. Saint-Clair, seeing a narrow byway, instantly turned his horse into it, hoping the tormentor would not follow him: but he was mistaken; tormentors do not so readily leave their prey. Thémynes turned, and quickened his pace to draw level with Saint-Clair, and to go on more comfortably with the conversation.

I said the byway was narrow. The horses could scarcely walk abreast; it was not surprising that Thémînes, excellent horseman as he was, should graze Saint-Clair's feet in passing beside him. Saint-Clair, whose rage had reached its utmost limit, could no longer control himself. He rose in his stirrups and smartly switched Thémînes' horse over the nose.

'What the devil is the matter with you, Auguste?' shouted Thémînes. 'Why do you hit my horse?'

'Why do you follow me?' replied Saint-Clair in a terrible voice.

'Are you out of your senses, Saint-Clair? Do you forget that you are talking to me?'

'I know very well I am talking to a coxcomb.'

'Saint-Clair! . . . I think you are mad. . . . Listen : to-morrow you will apologise to me or pay for your impertinence.'

'Till to-morrow, then, sir.'

Thémînes pulled up his horse; Saint-Clair urged his, and soon disappeared in the wood.

At that moment he felt calmer. He had the weakness of believing in presentiments. He thought he would be killed next morning, and that that was a proper solution of his difficulty. One more day to spend; to-morrow no more anxieties, no more torments. He went home, sent his servant with a note to Colonel Beaujeu, wrote some letters, then dined with a good appetite, and, punctually at half-past eight, was at the little gate of the park.

'What is the matter with you to-day, Auguste?' said the Countess. 'You are strangely gay, and yet, with all your jokes, you cannot make me laugh. Yesterday you were just a little dull, and I, I was gay. To-day we have changed parts. . . . I have a frightful headache.'

'Dearest, I admit it; yes, I was very tedious yesterday. But to-day I have had fresh air, and exercise; I am marvellously well.'

'As for me, I got up late; I slept on this morning, and had tiresome dreams.'

'Ah! Dreams? Do you believe in dreams?'

'What folly!'

'I believe in them: I guess you had a dream announcing some tragic event.'

'Heavens! I never remember my dreams. However, I recollect. . . . I saw Massigny in my dream; so you see it was nothing very amusing.'

'Massigny! I should have thought, on the contrary, you would have been delighted to see him again.'

'Poor Massigny!'

'Poor Massigny?'

'Auguste, tell me, I beg you, what is the matter with you to-night? There is something fiendish in your smile. You look as if you were laughing at yourself.'

'Ah! Now you are treating me as badly as the old dowagers treat me, your friends.'

'Yes, Auguste, to-day you are wearing the expression you have with people you do not like.'

'Naughty one! Come, give me your hand.'

He kissed her hand with ironic gallantry, and they looked steadfastly at each other for a minute. Saint-Clair lowered his eyes first, and cried:

'How difficult it is to live in this world without getting a reputation for wickedness. . . . One would have to talk of nothing but the weather, or sport, or else discuss with your old friends the reports of their charitable committees.'

He took a paper from the table.

'See, here is your laundress' bill. Let us talk of this, my angel, and then you will not say I am wicked.'

'Really, Auguste, you astonish me——'

'This spelling reminds me of a letter I found this morning. I must tell you that I set my papers in order, for I am tidy now and again. And so I came across a love-letter from a dressmaker, with whom I was in love when I was sixteen. She had her own way of writing each word, and always the most complicated. Her style is worthy of her spelling. Well, since in those days I was something of a coxcomb, I did not think it suited my dignity to have a mistress who could not write like a Sévigné. I left her abruptly. To-day, re-reading the letter, I perceived that this dressmaker must have been very much in love with me.'

'Indeed! a woman whom you kept?'

'In great magnificence: on fifty francs a month.'

But my guardian did not make me too generous an allowance, for he used to say that a young man with money ruins himself, and ruins others.'

'And the woman? What became of her?'

'How do I know? . . . She probably died in a hospital.'

'Auguste. . . . If that were so, you would not speak so carelessly.'

'If you must know the truth, she married a respectable man; and I gave her a little dowry when I came of age.'

'How good you are! . . . But why do you like to seem wicked?'

'Oh yes, I am very good. . . . The more I think of it, the more I am persuaded that this woman really loved me. . . . But in those days I did not know how to distinguish a true feeling under a ridiculous form.'

'You should have brought me your letter. I should not have been jealous. We women have more intuition than you, and we see at once from the style of a letter, whether the author is speaking honestly, or is pretending a passion he does not feel.'

'And yet, how often you let yourselves be duped by fools and coxcombs!'

As he spoke he was looking at the Etruscan vase, and his eyes and voice had a sinister expression that Mathilde did not notice.

'Come now! You men, you all want to pass as

Don Juans. You imagine you are making dupes, when often you are only meeting Doña Juana, still wilier than yourselves.'

'I understand that, with your fine intellects, you ladies tell a fool a league away. At the same time, I have no doubt that our friend Massigny, a fool and a coxcomb, died blameless and a martyr.'

'Massigny? He was not too much of a fool; and then, there are foolish women. I must tell you a story about Massigny. . . . But, tell me, have I not told you it before?'

'Never,' replied Saint-Clair in a trembling voice.

'Massigny fell in love with me on his return from Italy. My husband knew him, and introduced him to me as a man of wit and taste. They were made for each other. Massigny was very attentive from the first; he gave me, as his own, water-colours he had bought at Schroth's, and talked music and painting to me with a tone of the most diverting superiority. One day he sent me an amazing letter. He told me, among other things, that I was the most respectable woman in Paris; for which reason he wanted to be my lover. I showed the letter to my cousin Julie. We were both mad in those days, and we resolved to play him a trick. One evening we had some visitors, among others Massigny. My cousin said to me: "I am going to read you a declaration of love I received this morning." She took the letter and read it amidst bursts of laughter. . . . Poor Massigny!'

Saint-Clair fell on his knees with a cry of joy. He seized the Countess's hand, and covered it with kisses and tears. Mathilde was surprised to the last degree, and thought at first that he was ill. Saint-Clair could say nothing but 'Forgive me ! Forgive me !' At last he rose. He was radiant. At that moment he was happier than on the day when for the first time Mathilde had said to him, 'I love you.'

'I am the most idiotic and most culpable of men,' he cried; 'for the last two days I have suspected you . . . and I did not ask you for an explanation——'

'You suspected me ! . . . And of what ?'

'I am a wretch ! . . . 'They told me you had loved Massigny, and——'

'Massigny !' and she began to laugh ; then, becoming instantly grave again, 'Auguste,' she said, 'you can be mad enough to have such suspicions, and hypocrite enough to hide them from me !'

There were tears in her eyes.

'I implore you, forgive me.'

'How should I not forgive you, dearest ? But first let me swear to you——'

'Oh ! I believe you, I believe you. Tell me nothing.'

'But, in Heaven's name, what motive could make you suspect such an improbability ?'

'Nothing, nothing at all but my cursed head . . . and . . . you see, that Etruscan vase that I knew Massigny had given you.'

The Countess clasped her hands with astonishment ; then, laughing aloud, she cried :

‘ My Etruscan vase ! My Etruscan vase ! ’

Saint-Clair could not help laughing himself, while big tears ran down his cheeks. He seized Mathilde in his arms and said :

‘ I will not loose you, till you have forgiven me. ’

‘ Yes, I forgive you, madman that you are ! ’ said she, kissing him tenderly. ‘ You make me very happy to-day : this is the first time I have seen you weep, and I believed you had no tears. ’

Then, escaping from his arms, she seized the Etruscan vase, and broke it in a thousand pieces on the floor. (It was a rare and irreplaceable specimen. There was a painting on it in three colours of a fight between a Lapithe and a Centaur.)

For some hours Saint-Clair was the most ashamed of men, and the happiest.

• • • • •
‘ Well, ’ said Roquantin to Colonel Beaujeu, whom he met in the evening at Tortoni’s, ‘ the news is true ? ’

‘ Too true, my friend, ’ replied the Colonel sadly.

‘ Tell me how it happened. ’

‘ Oh ! Very properly. Saint-Clair began by telling me he was in the wrong, but that he wished to draw Thémènes’ fire before apologising. I could but think he was right. Thémènes wished it decided by lot who should fire first. Saint-Clair demanded that it should be Thémènes. Thémènes fired : I saw Saint-

Clair turn round where he stood, and fall stone-dead. I have noticed before in many soldiers struck by a bullet this strange twisting round before death.'

'It is very odd,' said Roquantin. 'And what did Thémînes do?'

'Oh! What must be done on such occasions.' He threw his pistol on the ground with an air of regret. He threw it with such force that he smashed the hammer. It was an English pistol, by Manton; I doubt if there is a gunsmith in Paris who could make him another.'

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The Countess saw nobody; for three years; winter and summer alike, she stayed in her country-house, scarcely leaving her room, and waited on by a mulatto woman who knew of her relations with Saint-Clair, and to whom she did not say two words a day. At the end of three years her cousin Julie came back from a long journey, she forced her way in, and found poor Mathilde so thin and pale that she thought she was looking on the corpse of the woman she had left beautiful and full of life. She succeeded with difficulty in drawing her from her retreat, and in taking her to Hyères. The Countess languished there for three or four months, and then died of a consumption caused by domestic trouble; so Doctor M—— said, who attended her.

THE VENUS OF ILLE

*Ἰλεὺς ἦν δ' ἐγὼ, ἔστω ὁ ἀνδρὶς
καὶ ἥπιος, οὕτως ἀνδρείος ὢν.*

ΛΟΤΚΙΑΝΟΤ ΦΙΛΟΨΕΤΑΗΣ.

I WAS descending the last slope of the Canigou, and, although the sun had already set, distinguished on the plain the houses of the little town of Ille, whither I was going.

'You know,' said I to the Catalan who had been my guide since the day before, 'you know, of course, where M. de Peyrehorade lives?'

'Know it!' he cried; 'I know his house as well as I know my own; if it were not so dark, I would point it out to you. It's the finest in Ille. He has money, oh yes, M. de Peyrehorade; and he is marrying his son to a woman still richer than himself.'

'And is this marriage to come off soon?' I asked him.

'Soon! It is likely the fiddlers are already booked for the wedding. To-night perhaps, to-morrow, the day after, how do I know! It will be held at Puygarrig,

for it is Mademoiselle de Puygarrig that the young gentleman takes to wife. It will be fine, oh yes !'

I had an introduction to M. de Peyrehorade from my friend M. de P. He was, he had told me, a most learned antiquary, and obliging to a degree. He would be delighted to show me all the ruins for ten leagues round. So I was counting on him for visiting the neighbourhood of Ille, which was, I knew, rich in relics of antiquity and the Middle Ages. This marriage, of which I heard then for the first time, upset all my plans.

'I am going to be a spoil-sport,' I told myself. But I was expected; announced by M. de P., I had to present myself.

'Bet, sir,' said my guide, when we were already on the plain, 'bet me a cigar that I guess what you are going to do at M. de Peyrehorade's.'

'But,' I replied, handing him a cigar, 'it is not very difficult to guess. At this time of day, when one has done six leagues in the Canigou, the most pressing business is supper.'

'Yes, but to-morrow. . . . See, I bet you have come to Ille to have a look at the idol? I guessed that when I saw you make a picture of the Saints of Serrabona.'

'The idol! What idol?' The word had excited my curiosity.

'What! They did not tell you at Perpignan how M. de Peyrehorade had found an idol in earth?'

‘You mean a statue in terra cotta, in clay?’

‘Not at all. In copper, truly, and there is plenty of it to turn into pennies. It weighs as heavy as a church bell. We found it in the earth at the foot of an olive-tree.’

‘Then you were present at the discovery?’

‘Yes, sir. M. de Peyrehorade told us a fortnight ago, Jean Coll and me, to root up an old olive that had been frozen last year, for it was a bad year that, as you know. See then, in working, Jean Coll, who was going it with a will, gives a blow with a pickaxe, and I hear bimm . . . as if he had struck on a bell. “What is it?” says I. We dig on, we dig, and there before us is a black hand, which was like the hand of a dead man coming out of the earth. As for me, fear gets a hold of me. I clear out to the master, and I says: “Dead men, master, under the olive-tree! We must call the priest.” “What dead men?” says he to me. He comes, and he has no sooner seen the hand than he sings out, “An antique! An antique!” You would have thought he had found a treasure. And there he was, with the mattock, with his hands, setting himself at it, and doing as much work as the two of us together.’

‘And what did you find in the end?’

‘A big black woman more than half naked, if you’ll excuse my saying so, sir, all in copper, and M. de Peyrehorade told us it was an idol of the time of the pagans, of the time of Charlemagne, eh!’

'I see what it is. . . . Some good bronze Virgin from a destroyed convent.'

'A good Virgin! Oh yes! . . . I would have recognised her well enough if it had been a good Virgin. It's an idol, I tell you! it's plainly to be seen in her air. She fixes you with big white eyes. . . . You would say she was staring you out. You lower the eyes, I can tell you, in looking at her.'

'White eyes? Doubtless they are inlaid in the bronze. It will be a Roman statue, perhaps.'

'Roman! That's it. M. de Peyrehorade said it was a Roman. Ah! I can see that you are a savant like him.'

'Is it entire, well preserved?'

'Oh, nothing is missing, sir. It is still more beautiful, and better finished than the bust of Louis Philippe, which is at the town-hall, in painted plaster. But for all that, I do not care for the idol's face. She has a naughty air, and that's what she is, too.'

'Naughty! What harm has she done to you?'

'Not exactly to me; but you shall see. We were straining all we could to get her upright, and M. de Peyrehorade was tugging at the rope too, though he has scarcely more strength than a chicken, the worthy man! With a lot of trouble we get her straight. I was laying hold of a tile to wedge her up, when, patatras! down she falls in a lump over on the other side. Says I, "Look out below!" Not quick enough though, for Jean Coll had not time to get his leg out of the way——'

‘And he was hurt?’

‘Broken clean as a vine-prop, his poor leg! Poor fellow! When I saw that, I was mad. I wanted to smash up the idol with the mattock, but M. de Peyrehorade would not let me. He gave money to Jean Coll, who all the same is still in bed, after fifteen days since it happened, and the doctor says he will never walk as well with that leg as with the other. It is hard luck for him, for he was our best runner, and, next to the young gentleman, the trickiest tennis-player. M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade was sad about it, for he used to play with Coll. My word! it was fine to see how they used to keep the balls going. Paf! Paf! They never touched ground.’

Chatting like this, we entered Ille, and I soon found myself in the presence of M. de Peyrehorade. He was a little old man, still brisk and active, powdered, red-nosed, with a jovial, joking air. Before opening the letter from M. de P. he had set me down before a well-laden table, and presented me to his wife and son, as an illustrious archæologist who was to lift Roussillon¹ out of the oblivion in which it was left by the indifference of the savants.

Eating as I did with a good appetite, for nothing gives one a better than the sharp air of the mountains, I examined my hosts. I have said a word of M. de Peyrehorade; I must add that he was vivacity itself.

¹ An old province of France, forming the department of the Eastern Pyrenees.

He talked, ate, got up, ran to his library, brought me books, showed me prints, helped me to wine; he was never still for two minutes together. His wife, a little too fat, like most Catalan women who have passed forty, seemed to me a confirmed provincial, solely busied with her household cares. Although the supper was ample for six persons at least, she ran to the kitchen, had pigeons killed, a huge number of them fried, and opened I do not know how many pots of preserves. In an instant the table was covered with plates and bottles, and I should certainly have died of indigestion if I had only taken a taste of all the things they offered me. However, every dish I refused brought fresh excuses. They feared I should be badly accommodated at Ille. In the provinces one's resources are so limited, and Parisians are so fastidious!

M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade¹ budged no more than a Terminus¹ in the midst of the comings and goings of his parents. He was a big young man of twenty - six, with a handsome, regular, but rather expressionless face. His height and his athletic build quite justified the reputation as an indefatigable tennis-player that he enjoyed in the countryside. That night he was elegantly dressed, exactly like the latest fashion plate. But he seemed to me uncomfortable in his clothes; he was stiff as a stake in his velvet collar, and when he moved, was all of a piece. His big browned hands and short nails contrasted oddly with his dress.

¹ The god of Boundaries.

They were the hands of a labourer issuing from the sleeves of a dandy. Besides, although he examined me very curiously from head to foot, in my quality of Parisian, he spoke to me only once throughout the evening, and that was to ask me where I had bought my watch-chain.

‘Ah, now, my dear guest,’ said M. de Peyrehorade, as supper came to an end, ‘you belong to me, you are in my house. I shall not release you until you have seen everything of interest we have among our mountains. You must learn to know our Roussillon, and do it justice. You do not dream of all we are going to show you. Phœnician relics, Celtic, Roman, Arabian, Byzantine, you shall see everything, from cedar to hyssop. I will take you everywhere, and not spare you a single brick.’

A fit of coughing obliged him to stop. I took advantage of it to tell him I should be unhappy to inconvenience him, under circumstances so interesting to his family. If he would be kind enough to give me his good advice on the excursions I should make, I should be able, without putting him to the trouble of accompanying me——

‘Ah! You mean the marriage of this young man,’ he cried, interrupting me. ‘A bagatelle; it will come off the day after to-morrow. You will take part in the wedding with us—no public affair, for the betrothed is in mourning for her aunt, whose heiress she is. Consequently no fête and no ball. . . . It is a pity . . .

you would have seen our Catalán women dance. They are pretty, and you might have been struck with a desire of imitating my Alphonse. One marriage, they say, brings others. On Saturday, the young people being married, I am free, and we set out. You must forgive me for boring you with a provincial wedding. And you a Parisian satiated with fêtes . . . and, too, a wedding without a ball! However, you will see a bride . . . a bride . . . you will tell me what you think of her. . . . But you are a serious man, and have given up looking at women. I have something better to show you. I will let you see something! . . . I keep a grand surprise for you for to-morrow.'

'*Mon Dieu!*' said I, 'it is difficult to have a treasure in the house without the public learning of it. I think I can guess the surprise you are preparing for me. But if it is connected with your statue, the description my guide gave me has only served to whet my curiosity, and prepare me to admire.'

'Ah! He spoke to you of the idol, for that is their name for my beautiful Venus Tur—— But I do not want to tell you anything. To-morrow, in daylight, you shall see her, and tell me if I am not right in thinking her a masterpiece. By Heaven, you could not have come at a better moment. There are inscriptions that I, poor dunce, explain in my own way . . . but a savant from Paris! You will laugh, perhaps, at my interpretation . . . for I have written a paper . . . I who am speaking to you . . . old provincial antiquary,

I have made my attempt, . . . I want to make the press groan. . . . If you should be so kind as to read me, and correct me, I could hope. . . . For example, I am very curious to know how you would translate this inscription on the base: CAVE . . . but I want to ask you nothing yet! To-morrow, to-morrow! Not a word on the Venus to-day!’

‘You are right, Peyrehorade,’ said his wife, ‘to leave your idol there. You should see that you prevent our guest from eating. Why, he has seen statues at Paris, much more beautiful than yours. At the Tuileries there are dozens of them, and in bronze too.’

‘Behold the ignorance, the sacred ignorance of the provinces!’ broke in M. de Peyrehorade. ‘To compare an admirable antique to the dull figures of Coustou!’

“‘Comme avec irrévérence
Parle des dieux ma ménagère!’”

Do you know my wife wanted me to melt my statue to make a bell of it for our church. She would have been its godmother, that is why. A masterpiece of Myron, sir!’

‘Masterpiece! Masterpiece! A fine masterpiece she has made! The breaking of a man’s leg!’

‘My wife, do you see this?’ said M. de Peyrehorade in a resolute tone, stretching towards her his right leg in a worked silk stocking. ‘If my Venus had broken this very leg for me, I should not regret it.’

‘*Mon Dieu!* Peyrehorade, how can you say that?’

Fortunately the man is better. And yet, I cannot bear to look at the statue that has done such harm. Poor Jean Coll !'

'Wounded by Venus, sir,' said M. de Peyrehorade with a loud laugh. 'Wounded by Venus, the rascal complains :

"Veneris nec praemia noris."

Who has not been wounded by Venus ?'

M. Alphonse, who knew French better than he knew Latin, winked with an air of intelligence, and looked at me as much as to ask : 'And you, Parisian, do you understand ?'

Supper came to an end. For an hour I had not been eating. I was tired, and could not succeed in hiding the frequent yawns that escaped me. Madame de Peyrehorade was the first to notice them, and remarked that it was time to go to bed. Then began new apologies on the poor lodging I was going to have. I should find things different from Paris. In the provinces things are so badly arranged. I should have to make allowances for the people of the Roussillon. I vainly protested that after a walk in the mountains a bundle of straw would seem delicious bedding. They begged me all the time to forgive poor country-people if they did not treat me as well as they could have wished. At last I went up to the room designed for me, accompanied by M. de Peyrehorade. The staircase, whose upper flights were of wood, ended in the

middle of a passage into which opened a number of rooms.

'On the right,' said my host, 'are the rooms I intend for the future Madame Alphonse. Your room is at the end of the corridor opposite. You know,' he added, with an air that was meant to be sly, 'you know, one must isolate the newly married. You are at one end of the house, they at the other.'

We entered a well-furnished room, where the first thing on which I cast my eyes was a bed seven feet long and six broad, and so high that a stool was necessary in hoisting oneself into it. My host, having pointed out the bell to me, and assured himself that the sugar-bowl was full and the bottles of eau-de-Cologne duly placed on the dressing-table, asked me many times if there were nothing I wanted, wished me a goodnight, and left me to myself.

The windows were shut. Before undressing, I opened one of them to breathe the fresh night air, delicious after a long supper. In front was the Canigou, at all times of an admirable aspect, but seeming to me that night to be the most beautiful mountain in the world, lit as it was by a resplendent moon. I remained for some minutes contemplating its marvellous outline, and was going to close my window, when, looking down, I perceived the statue, on a pedestal forty yards or so from the house. It was placed at the corner of a quickset hedge that divided a little garden from a vast perfectly level square, which was, I learnt later, the

tennis-court of the town. This land, the property of M. de Peyrehorade, had been given by him to the public, at the urgent request of his son.

At the distance where I was I found it difficult to distinguish the attitude of the statue; I could only judge of its height, which seemed to me six feet or thereabouts. At this moment two louts from the town crossed the tennis-court, quite near the hedge, whistling the pretty Roussillon air, *Montagnes régalaides*. They stopped to look at the statue; indeed one of them loudly apostrophised her. He spoke Catalan; but I had been long enough in Roussillon to gather what he was saying.

‘There you are, slut!’ (the Catalan term was stronger). ‘There you are!’ said he. ‘So it’s you who have broken Jean Coll’s leg. If you were mine I’d break your neck for you.’

‘Bah! what would you do it with?’ said the other. ‘She’s made of copper, and so hard that Etienne broke his file on it at the first cut he tried. It’s copper from the time of the pagans; it’s harder than I don’t know what.’

‘If I had my cold chisel’ (it seemed he was a locksmith’s apprentice) ‘I’d soon make her big white eyes pop out, as I’d get almonds from their shells. It’s done, for no more than five francs.’

They moved a few steps further off.

‘I must give the idol good-night,’ said the biggest of the apprentices, suddenly stopping.

He bent down, and probably picked up a stone. I saw him stretch his arm, and throw something, and instantly a blow resounded on the bronze. At the same moment, the apprentice put his hand to his head, and loosed a yell of pain.

‘She has thrown it back at me!’ he cried.

And my two louts took to their heels as fast as they could go. It was clear that the stone had rebounded from the metal, and punished the wag for the insult he offered the goddess.

I closed the window, laughing heartily.

‘Another Vandal punished by Venus! May all the destroyers of our antiquities have their heads broken in the same way!’

With this charitable wish I fell asleep.

It was full daylight when I woke. By my bed were, on one side, M. de Peyrehorade in his dressing-gown; on the other, a servant sent by his wife, with a cup of chocolate in his hand.

‘Come, up with you, Parisian! Behold my lazy fellows from the Capital!’ my host kept saying, while I was hurriedly dressing. ‘Eight o’clock, and still in bed! Why, I have been up since six. Three times I have come upstairs. I came up to your door on tiptoe: no one, not a sign of life. You will be ill from sleeping too much at your age. And my Venus not yet seen! Come, toss me down this cup of Barcelona chocolate. . . . Real contraband. . . . Chocolate of a kind you do not get in Paris. Strengthen yourself, for,

when once you are before my Venus, no one will be able to get you away again.'

In five minutes I was ready, that is to say, half-shaved, badly buttoned, and burnt by the chocolate that I gulped boiling. I went down into the garden and found myself before an admirable statue.

It was indeed a Venus, and marvellously beautiful. She had the upper part of her body nude, as the ancients usually represented the supreme divinities; the right hand, lifted to the height of the breast, was turned palm inwards, the thumb and the two first fingers stretched out, the other two lightly folded. The other hand, by the hips, supported the drapery that covered the lower part of the body. The attitude of the statue recalled that of the morra-player that is known, I do not know why, under the name of Germanicus. Perhaps they had wished to show the goddess playing at the game of morra.¹

However that was, it is impossible to imagine anything more perfect than the body of this Venus; nothing more suave, more voluptuous than its contours; nothing nobler and more graceful than its draperies. I expected some work of the decadent Empire; I saw a masterpiece of the best period of sculpture. What struck me above all was its exquisite truth of form, such that one could have believed it a cast from nature, if nature ever produced so perfect a model.

¹ A guessing game, played with the fingers.

The hair, lifted over the forehead, seemed to have once been gilt. The head, small, like those of nearly all Greek statues, was slightly inclined forward. As for the face, I shall never succeed in expressing its strange character, of a type like that of no antique statue I can remember. This was not that calm, severe beauty of the Greek sculptors, who deliberately gave every feature a majestic immobility. Here, on the contrary, I observed with surprise the evident intention of the artist to render malice, even wickedness. All the features were slightly contracted: the eyes a little oblique, the corners of the mouth lifted, the nostrils slightly distended. Disdain, irony, cruelty, were to be read on this face, which was, nevertheless, of an incredible beauty. Indeed, the more one looked at this admirable statue, the more one was troubled that so wonderful a beauty could be allied to a complete absence of sensibility.

'If the model ever existed,' said I to M. de Peyrehorade, 'and I doubt if Heaven ever produced such a woman, how sorry I am for her lovers! She must have found pleasure in making them die of despair. There is something fierce in her expression, and yet I have never seen anything so beautiful.'

'*C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée!*' cried M. de Peyrehorade, satisfied with my enthusiasm.

This expression of infernal irony was perhaps emphasised by the contrast between the eyes, of inlaid silver, and very brilliant, and the film of blackish green with which time had covered the statue. These brilliant

eyes produced a certain illusion of reality, of life. I remembered what my guide had told me, that she made those lower their eyes who looked at her. It was almost true, and I could not suppress a movement of anger with myself for feeling a little ill at ease in front of that figure of bronze.

‘Now that you have admired everything in detail, my dear antiquarian colleague,’ said my host, ‘we will open, if you please, a scientific discussion. What do you make of this inscription that you have not yet observed?’

He pointed to the base of the statue, and I read there these words :

• CAVE AMANTEM.

‘*Quid dicis, doctissime?*’ he asked me, rubbing his hands. ‘Let us see if we are at one over the sense of this *cave amantem*.’

‘But,’ I replied, ‘there are two senses. One could translate: “Beware of the one who loves you, distrust lovers.” But, in this sense, I do not know if *cave amantem* would be good Latin. Observing the diabolic expression of the lady, I find it easier to believe that the artist meant to warn the spectator against this terrible beauty. I should construe then: “Look out for yourself, if *she* loves you.”’

‘Humph!’ said M. de Peyrehorade. ‘Yes, it is an admissible translation: but, by your leave, I prefer the first sense, which I shall, however, develop. You know Venus’s lover?’

‘There are many.’

‘Yes; but Vulcan was the first. Did they not mean : “In spite of your beauty, and your disdainful air, you will have a smith and an ugly cripple for your lover” ? A profound lesson, sir, for coquettes !’

I could not help smiling, so far-fetched did I think the explanation.

‘It is a terrible language, Latin, with its conciseness,’ I observed, so as to avoid a formal contradiction of my antiquary, and I went back a few steps to get a better view of the statue.

‘An instant, colleague !’ said M. de Peyrehorade, catching me by the arm. ‘You have not seen all. There is yet another inscription. Get up on the base, and look at the right arm.’ As he spoke, he helped me to mount.

I clung without too much ceremony to the neck of the Venus, with whom I began to familiarise myself. I even looked at her for an instant from under her very nose, and found her, at close quarters, still more wicked and still more beautiful. Then I saw, engraved on the arm, some characters in antique running hand, as it seemed to me. With the help of strong spectacles I spelt out what follows, M. de Peyrehorade repeating each word as I pronounced it, approving with gesture and voice. I read then :

VENERI TVRBVL . . .

EVTYCHES MYRO

IMPERIO FECIT.

After the word TVRBVL in the first line, it seemed to me there were some letters effaced ; but TVRBVL was perfectly legible.

‘That means?’ asked my host, radiant and smiling with malice, for he was pretty sure that I should not get easily out of this TVRBVL.

‘There is one word that I do not yet understand,’ I said ; ‘all the rest is easy. Eutyches Myron made this offering to Venus at her order.’

‘Splendid. But what do you make of TVRBVL? What is TVRBVL?’

‘TVRBVL bothers me considerably. I look in vain among the known epithets of Venus for one that could help me. Let us see, what would you say to TVRBVLENTA? The troubling, the disturbing Venus? . . . You observe I am continually biassed by her expression of wickedness. TVRBVLENTA, it is not at all a bad epithet for Venus,’ I added doubtfully, for I was not myself well satisfied with my explanation.

‘Turbulent Venus! Venus the brawler! Ah! You think then that my Venus is a Venus of the pot-house? Not at all, sir; she is a Venus of good society. But I am going to explain you this TVRBVL. . . . At least, you promise not to divulge my discovery until my monograph is printed. You see I am proud of it, of this discovery. . . . You must really leave us some ears to glean, us poor devils of provincials. You are so rich, you great savants of Paris.’

From the top of the pedestal where I was perched all

this time, I solemnly promised him that I would not be so base as to steal his discovery.

‘For TVRBVL . . ., sir,’ said he, coming nearer and dropping his voice for fear lest some one else besides myself should be able to hear, ‘read TVRBVLNERAE.’

‘I do not understand any better.’

‘Listen to me. A league from here at the foot of the mountain is a village called Boulternère. It is a corruption of the Latin word TVRBVLNERA. Nothing more common than these inversions. Boulternère, sir, has been a Roman town. I had always suspected it, but had never had a proof of it. There is the proof. This Venus was the local divinity of the city of Boulternère; and this word Boulternère, whose ancient origin I have just demonstrated, proves something much more curious, and that is^h that Boulternère, before being a Roman town, was a Phœnician!’

He stopped a moment to take breath and enjoy my surprise. I succeeded in smothering a strong desire to laugh.

‘In fact,’ he pursued, ‘TVRBVLNERA is pure Phœnician. TVR pronounce TOUR . . . TOUR and SOUR, the same word, don’t you think? SOUR is the Phœnician name for Tyre. There is no need for me to remind you of its meaning. BVL is Baal; Bal, Bel, Bul, slight differences of pronunciation. As for NERA, that gives me a little trouble. I am tempted to believe, for want of a Phœnician word, that it comes from the

Greek *νηρός*, damp, marshy. It would then be a hybrid word. To justify *νηρός*, I will show you at Boulternère how the streams from the mountains form poisonous fens. On the other hand, the termination *NERA* might have been added much later in honour of Nera Pivesuvia, the wife of Tetricus, who would have been in some way a benefactress of the city of TVRBVL. But, on account of the marshes, I prefer the etymology of *νηρός*.'

He took a pinch of snuff with a satisfied air.

'But, to leave the Phœnicians and come back to the inscription. I construe then: "To Venus of Boulternère, Myron dedicates, at her orders, this statue, his work!"'

I was careful not to criticise his etymology, but I wished in my turn to show some penetration, and I said to him:

'Stop, sir. Myron consecrated something, but I do not at all see that it was this statue.'

'What!' he cried. 'Was not Myron a famous Greek sculptor? The talent would run in his family. One of his descendants will have made this statue. Nothing is more certain.'

'But,' I replied, 'I notice a little hole in the arm. I think it has served to hold something, a bracelet, for example, that this Myron gave to Venus as an expiatory offering. Myron was an unhappy lover. Venus was annoyed with him: he appeased her by the dedication of a golden bracelet. Observe that *fecit* is very often

used for *consecravit*. They are synonymous terms. I would show you more than one example if I had Gruter at hand, or Orellius. It is natural that a lover should see Venus in a dream, and imagine that she commands him to give a golden bracelet to her statue. Myron dedicated a bracelet to her. . . . Then the Bãrbarians, or else some sacrilegious thief——'

'Ah! It's easy to see that you are a romancer!' cried my host, giving me his hand to come down 'No, sir, it is a work of the school of Myron. You have only to look at the technique to agree with me.'

Since, upon principle, I never flatly contradict pig-headed antiquaries, I bent my head, with the air of a man convinced, saying :

'It is an admirable piece of work.'

'*Ah! mon Dieu!*' cried M. de Peyrehorade, 'another Vandal trick! Some one must have thrown a stone at my statue!'

He had just noticed a white mark a little below the bosom of the Venus. I observed a similar trace on the fingers of the right hand, which I supposed had been touched by the stone in its flight, or else a piece of it had been broken off by the shock and flung back on the hand. I told my host the story of the insult I had witnessed and the prompt punishment that had followed it. He was much amused, and, comparing the apprentice to Diomedes, hoped that, like the Greek hero, he might see all his fellows turned to white birds.

The lunch bell interrupted this classical conversa-

tion, and, just as on the evening before, I was compelled to eat enough for four. Then M. de Peyrehorade's farmers arrived ; and while he gave them audience, his son took me to see a carriage he had bought for his fiancée at Toulouse, and which I admired, of course. Then I went with him into the stable, where he kept me half an hour, extolling his horses, giving me their pedigrees, and telling me the prizes they had won in the local races. At last, a grey mare that he intended for her, led him to speak of his betrothed.

'We shall see her to-day,' he said. 'I do not know whether you will think her pretty. You are fastidious, at Paris ; but everybody, here and at Perpignan, thinks her charming. And one good thing is that she is very rich. Her aunt, from Prades, left her money to her. Oh, I am going to be very happy.'

I was profoundly shocked to see a young man more moved by the dowry of his betrothed than by her pretty face.

'You know something of jewelry,' pursued M. Alphonse. 'What do you think of this? Here is the ring I am to give her to-morrow.'

As he spoke he took from the first joint of his little finger a heavy ring, ornamented with diamonds, and made of two clasped hands : an allusion which I thought infinitely poetical. The workmanship was old, but I judged they had retouched it in mounting the diamonds. Inside the ring these words were written

in Gothic characters: '*Sempr' ab ti,*' that is to say, 'Ever with thee.'

'It is a pretty ring,' I said to him; 'but those added diamonds have lost it a little of its character.'

'Oh, it is very much prettier like that,' he replied, smiling. 'There is twelve hundred francs worth of diamonds there. My mother gave it me. It was an heirloom . . . from the times of the knights. It belonged to my grandmother, who had it from hers. God knows when it was made.'

'The custom at Paris,' said I, 'is to give a perfectly plain ring, usually made of two different metals, like gold and platina. There, that other ring, that you have on this finger, would be very suitable. This one, with its diamonds, and its hands in relief, is so big that one could not get a glove over it.'

'Oh, Madame Alphonse will do as she likes. I think she will anyhow be very pleased to have it. Twelve hundred francs on the finger, that is agreeable. This little ring,' he added, looking with an air of satisfaction at the plain one he was wearing, 'was given me by a woman in Paris one Shrove-Tuesday. Ah! I had a good time in Paris, two years ago! That is the place for pleasure!' . . . And he sighed regretfully.

We were to dine at Puygarrig that day, at the house of the bride's parents. We got into carriages and went to the château, about a league and a half from Ille. I was introduced and received as a friend of the family. I will not speak of the dinner, nor of the conversation

that followed it, in which I took but little part. M. Alphonse, placed beside his betrothed, said a word in her ear every quarter of an hour. As for her, she scarcely lifted her eyes, and, every time her future husband spoke to her, she blushed with modesty, but answered him without embarrassment.

Mademoiselle de Puygarrig was eighteen ; her supple, delicate figure was a contrast to the bony build of her robust fiancé. She was not only beautiful but fascinating. I was pleased with the perfect simplicity of all her replies ; and her air of kindliness, not free, however, from a slight tinge of malice, reminded me, in spite of myself, of my host's Venus. In the secret comparison that I made, I asked myself whether the superior beauty that had to be allowed to the statue, was not largely due to her tigress-like expression ; for energy, even in evil passions, always moves us to wonder and a kind of involuntary admiration.

'What a pity,' I thought, on leaving Puygarrig, 'that so delightful a person should be rich, and that her dowry should make her sought for by a man unworthy of her.'

On the way back to Ille, not having too much to say to Madame de Peyrehorade, with whom I thought it polite to talk occasionally :

'You are bold souls in the Roussillon !' I said. 'What, madame, you have a wedding on a Friday ! At Paris we should be more superstitious ; no one would dare to get married on that day.'

'*Mon Dieu!* do not talk of it,' she said. 'If it had only depended on me, I should most certainly have chosen another day. But Peyrehorade wanted it, and I had to give in to him. It troubles me none the less. What if there should be some misfortune? There must be some reason for it, or why should everybody fight shy of Fridays?'

'Friday!' cried her husband. 'It is the day of Venus! A good day for a wedding. You see, my dear colleague, I think of nothing but my Venus. In her honour, on account of her, I chose the Friday. To-morrow, if you like, before the wedding, we will make her a little offering, we will sacrifice a couple of wood-pigeons, and, if I knew where to find some incense——'

'Shame on you, Peyrehorade!' interrupted his wife, scandalised to a degree. 'Burn incense to an idol! It would be an abomination! What would they say of us in the place?'

'At least,' said M. de Peyrehorade, 'you will let me set a crown of roses and lilies on her head:

'"*Manibus date lilia plenis.*"'

'You see, sir, that the charter is an empty word. We have no liberty of sect.'

The plans for the next day were settled in the following manner. Everybody was to be ready and dressed at ten o'clock precisely. After chocolate we were to drive to Puygarrig. The civil marriage would be held

in the village *mairie*, and the religious ceremony in the chapel of the château. Luncheon was to come next. After lunch we were to pass the time as we could till seven. At seven we were to return to Ille, to M. de Peyrehorade's, where the united families were to sup. The rest goes without saying. Since dancing was impossible, they wanted as much eating as possible.

Since eight o'clock I had been sitting before the Venus, pencil in hand, beginning the head of the statue for the twentieth time without being able to catch the expression. M. de Peyrehorade came and went about me, gave me advice, and repeated his Phœnician etymologies; then laid Bengal roses on the pedestal of the statue, and, in a tragi-comic voice, made her his vows for the couple who were about to live under his roof. About nine o'clock he went in to dress, and M. Alphonse appeared at the same time, well got up, in a new suit, white gloves, patent leather shoes, chased buttons, and a rose in his button-hole.

'You will make a portrait of my wife?' he asked, leaning over my drawing. 'She is pretty too.'

At this moment began, on the tennis-court of which I have spoken, a game that immediately caught the attention of M. Alphonse. And I, tired, hopeless of rendering that diabolic face, soon left my drawing in order to look at the players. There were among them some Spanish muleteers, who had arrived the day before. They were men from Aragon and from Navarre, and almost all were marvellously skilful. The men of Ille

although encouraged by the presence and advice of M. Alphonse, were pretty quickly defeated by these new champions. The native spectators were in despair. M. Alphonse looked at his watch. It was only half-past nine. His mother was not yet dressed. He hesitated no longer: he took off his coat, asked for a jersey, and challenged the Spaniards. I watched his proceedings smiling and a little surprised.

‘One must keep up the honour of the country,’ said he.

Then I found him truly beautiful. He was eager. His toilette, which had just been so important, no longer meant anything to him. A few minutes earlier he would have been frightened of turning his head for fear of deranging his tie. Now, he was no longer thinking of his curled hair, or his well-folded shirt-front. And as for his fiancée? . . . Upon my word, if it had been necessary, I believe he would have had the marriage postponed. I saw him hurriedly put on a pair of sandals, roll up his sleeves, and like Cæsar, rallying his soldiers at Dyrrachium, put himself with a confident air at the head of the beaten party. I jumped the hedge, and took up a comfortable position in the shade of a nettle-tree, so as to get a good view of both sides.

Contrary to general expectation, M. Alphonse missed the first ball; it is true that it came shaving the ground, launched with surprising force by an Aragonian who seemed to be the leader of the Spaniards.

He was a man of about forty, dry and wiry, six feet high, and his olive skin had a tint almost as deep as the bronze of the Venus.

M. Alphonse threw his racket on the ground with rage.

'It's this cursed ring,' he cried, 'that grips my finger and makes me miss a safe ball!'

Not without difficulty, he took off his diamond ring. I went towards him to take it; but he was before me, ran to the Venus, slipped the ring on her third finger, and regained his post at the head of the men of Ille.

He was pale, but calm and determined. Henceforward he did not make a single slip, and the Spaniards were utterly defeated. The enthusiasm of the spectators was a fine sight: some let loose a thousand shouts of joy, flinging their caps in the air; others shook him by the hand, calling him the glory of the place. If he had repelled an invasion I scarcely think he would have received livelier or more sincere congratulations. The annoyance of the beaten men still further added to the splendour of his victory.

'We will play again, my good fellow,' he said to the Aragonian in a tone of superiority; 'but I will give you points.'

I could have wished M. Alphonse had been more modest, and I was almost grieved over the humiliation of his rival.

The Spanish giant was deeply affected by the insult. I saw him pale under his tawny skin. He looked

gloomily at his racket, clenching his teeth; then, in a stifled voice he muttered, '*Me lo pagardás.*'

The voice of M. de Peyrehorade disturbed his son's triumph; my host, much astonished at not finding him superintending the harnessing of the new carriage, was very much more so on seeing him covered with sweat, and racket in hand. M. Alphonse ran to the house, washed his face and hands, resumed his new suit and his patent leather shoes, and, five minutes later, we were moving at a good pace along the road to Puygarrig. All the tennis-players of the town, and a great number of spectators, followed us with cheers.

The vigorous horses between the shafts could with difficulty keep ahead of these sturdy Catalans.

We were at Puygarrig, and just about to set out for the *mairie*, when M. Alphonse, striking his forehead, said to me in a low voice:

'This takes the cake! I have forgotten the ring! It's on the Venus's finger, devil take it! Anyhow, don't mention it to my mother. Perhaps she'll not notice anything.'

'You could send some one,' I said.

'Bah! My servant has stayed at Ille! I scarcely trust these here. Twelve hundred francs worth of diamonds. There is more than one could be tempted by that. Besides, what would people think of my absent-mindedness? They would laugh too much at me. They would call me the statue's husband. . . . So long as some one does not steal it. Fortunately the

idol frightens the rascals. They daren't come within an arm's-length of her. Bah! It's nothing; I have another ring.'

The two ceremonies, civil and* religious, passed off with proper state; and Mademoiselle de Puygarrig took the ring of a Parisian milliner, never dreaming that her fiancé was sacrificing a love-token. Then we sat down to table, where we drank, ate, and even sang, all at great length. I was pained for the bride's sake, by the gross joy which was boisterous about her; however, she put a better face on it than I would have expected, and her embarrassment was neither awkward nor affected.

Perhaps difficult situations bring courage with them.

Lunch ended as Providence pleased; at four o'clock; the men went for a walk in the magnificent park, or watched the peasants of Puygarrig in their holiday best dancing on the lawn of the château. In this way we spent some hours. Meanwhile the women were bustling round the bride, who was exhibiting her wedding presents. Then she changed her dress, and I noticed that she covered her beautiful hair with a cap and feathered hat. Wives hold nothing more important than to put on as soon as they may the attire that custom forbids them as spinsters.

It was nearly eight when we prepared to set out for Ille. But before that there was a pathetic scene. Mademoiselle de Puygarrig's aunt, who was like a mother to her, a very old woman and most devout, was

unable to go with us to the town. When we were starting, she gave her niece a most touching sermon on her duties as a wife, a sermon that resulted in torrents of tears, and endless kisses. M. de Peyrehorade compared the separation to the Rape of the Sabine women. We set out, however, and on the journey every one did his best to distract the bride and make her laugh ; but in vain.

At Ille, supper was waiting for us, and what a supper ! If I had been shocked by the gross jollity of the morning, I was very much more so by the ambiguities and jokes to which the bridegroom and especially the bride were subjected. The bridegroom, who had vanished for a moment before sitting down to table, was pale and icily serious. Every moment he drank old Collioure wine, almost as strong as brandy. I was beside him, and felt it was my duty to warn him :

‘Take care ! They say that wine . . .’

I do not know what idiocy I said to him, to put myself in tune with the party.

He pressed my knee, and said, very low :

‘When we leave the table . . . may I have a word with you ?’

His solemn tone surprised me. I observed him more attentively, and noticed the strange alteration of his features.

‘Do you feel unwell ?’ I asked him.

‘No.’

And he started drinking again.

Meanwhile, in the midst of shouts and hand-clappings, a child of eleven years old, who had crept under the table, exhibited to the guests a pretty red and white ribbon that he had just taken off the bride's ankle. They call that her garter. It was immediately cut in pieces, and distributed among the young men, who put it in their button-holes, after an old custom still kept up in some patriarchal families. It was an occasion for the bride to blush to the whites of her eyes. . . . But her discomfiture was complete when M. de Peyrehorade, calling for silence, sang her some Catalan verses, impromptu, so he said. This is what they came to, if I rightly understod them :—

'What is it, my friends? Does the wine I have drunk make me see double? There are two Venuses here. . . .'

The bridegroom turned his head sharply with an air of terror, that made everybody laugh.

'Yes,' pursued M. de Peyrehorade, 'there are two Venuses in my household. I found one in the earth, like a truffle; the other, dropped from the skies, has just shared out her girdle amongst us.'

He meant her garter.

'My son, choose which you like, the Roman Venus, or the Catalan. The rascal takes the Catalan, and his is the better part. The Roman is black, the Catalan is white. The Roman is cold, the Catalan sets aflame everything that comes near her.'

This peroration raised such a hubbub, such boister-

ous applause, and such shouts of laughter, that I thought the ceiling would come down on our heads. Round the table there were only three serious faces, those of the newly married and my own. I had a bad headache; and then, I do not know why, a wedding always makes me sad. This one, besides, disgusted me a little.

The vice-mayor sang the last couplets, which, I must say, were very free, and we went into the drawing-room to see the departure of the bride, who was soon to be led to her room, for it was nearly midnight.

M. Alphonse drew me into a window corner, and said, looking the other way:

'You will laugh at me . . . But I don't know what's the matter with me . . . I am bewitched! Devil take me!'

My first idea was that he thought himself menaced by some such misfortune as is mentioned by Montaigne and Madame de Sévigné.'

'Tout l'empire amoureux est plein d'histoires tragiques, etc.'

'I thought that that kind of accident only happened to men of brains,' said I to myself.

'You have drunk too much Collioure wine, my dear M. Alphonse,' I said to him. 'I warned you.'

'Yes, perhaps. But it's something far more terrible.'

He gasped as he spoke. I thought him completely drunk.

'You remember my ring,' he went on, after a silence.

'What! Has some one taken it?'

'No.'

'Then you have it?'

'No . . . I . . . I cannot get it off the finger of that devil of a Venus.'

'Good. You have not pulled hard enough.'

'I did. . . . But the Venus. . . . She has closed her finger.'

He stared at me haggardly, leaning his weight on a window fastening, to keep himself from falling.

'A cock-and-bull tale,' said I. 'You pushed it on too far. To-morrow you will get it off with pincers. But take care not to hurt the statue.'

'No, I tell you. The finger of the Venus is closed, clasped; her hand is shut, do you understand? . . . She's my wife, apparently, since I gave her the ring. . . . She does not mean to give it back again.'

I felt a sudden shiver, and the sensation of goose-flesh. Then a great sigh of his sent me a whiff of wine, and all my emotion vanished.

'The wretched fellow,' I thought, 'is hopelessly drunk.'

'You are an antiquary, sir,' the bridegroom added, in a cheerless voice; 'you know these statues. . . . Perhaps there is some spring, some devilry, that I don't know at all. . . . If you would go and see?'

'Willingly,' said I. 'Come with me.'

'No. I would rather you went there alone.'

I left the drawing-room.

There had been a change in the weather during supper, and rain was beginning to fall heavily. I was about to ask for an umbrella, when a reflection stopped me. I should be a very great fool, I told myself, to go and verify what I had been told by a drunken man. Perhaps, too, he meant to play me some practical joke to make a laugh for these good provincials; and the least that could happen to me would be to be soaked to the skin and catch a bad cold.

From the door I took a look at the statue, dripping with water, and went up to my room, without going back into the salon. I got into bed, but sleep was long in coming. All the scenes of the day came again to my mind. I thought of the beautiful, pure young girl abandoned to a drunken brute. 'What a hideous thing,' I reflected, 'is a marriage of convenience! A mayor puts on a tri-colour band, a priest a stole, and there you have the nicest girl in the world delivered to the Minotaur. What can two beings who are not in love say to each other at such a moment, that two lovers would buy at the price of their lives? Can a woman ever love a man whom she has once seen as a brute? First impressions do not easily wear off, and, I am sure of it, M. Alphonse will well deserve to be hated. . . .'

During my monologue, that I considerably abridge, I had heard plenty of comings and goings in the

house, doors opening and shutting, and carriages departing; then I thought I had heard the light steps of many women on the staircase, going to the end of the corridor opposite my room. It was probably the procession of the bride, whom they were leading to bed. Then they went downstairs again. Madame de Peyrehorade's door had been closed. 'How troubled and ill at ease the poor girl must be,' I told myself. I turned in my bed with ill-humour. A bachelor plays a stupid part in a house where there is a wedding.

Silence had reigned for some time, when it was broken by heavy footsteps coming up the staircase. The wooden stairs creaked loudly.

'What a blockhead!' I exclaimed. 'I bet he is going to fall downstairs.'

All was quiet again. I took a book to change the current of my ideas. It was a guide to the department, embellished with a paper by M. de Peyrehorade, on the druidical relics of the district of Prades. I grew sleepy at the third page.

I slept badly, and woke often. It might be five in the morning, and I had been awake for twenty minutes, when the cock crew. It was nearly dawn. Then I distinctly heard the same heavy footsteps, the same creaking of the staircase that I had heard before falling asleep. I thought it odd. I tried, yawning, to guess why M. Alphonse was getting up so early. I thought of nothing likely. I was about to close my

eyes again, when my attention was aroused anew by strange stampings, with which were presently mingled the ringing of bells, and the noise of loudly opening doors. Then I distinguished confused shouting.

‘My drunkard has set the place on fire,’ thought I, jumping down from my bed.

I dressed quickly, and went into the corridor. From the other end of it came cries and lamentations, and a heartrending voice dominated all the others: ‘My son! My son!’ It was clear that a misfortune was come to M. Alphonse. I ran to the bride-chamber: it was full of people. The first thing I saw was the young man, half-dressed, stretched cross-wise on the bed, the wood of which was broken.’ He was livid, motionless. His mother wept and screamed beside him. M. de Peyrehorade was busy rubbing his temples with eau-de-Cologne, and putting salts under his nose. Alas! His son had been dead a long time. The bride was on a sofa at the other end of the room, seized by horrible convulsions. She uttered inarticulate cries, and two sturdy servants had the utmost difficulty in holding her.

‘*Mon Dieu!*’ I exclaimed. ‘What has happened?’

I went up to the bed, and lifted the body of the unfortunate young man; it was already stiff and cold. His clenched teeth and blackened face expressed the most frightful sufferings. It was clear enough that his death had been violent and his agony terrible. Not a trace of blood, however, on his clothes. I

opened his shirt, and saw on his breast a livid bruise that continued round his sides and back. One would have said he had been squeezed in a hoop of iron. My foot rested on something hard which lay on the carpet ; I bent and saw the diamond ring.

I took M. de Peyrehorade and his wife into their room ; then I had the bride brought to them.

‘You have still a daughter,’ I said, ‘and she has a right to your care.’ Then I left them alone.

There seemed to me to be no doubt that M. Alphonse had been the victim of an assassination, whose authors had found means of introducing themselves by night into the bride-chamber. These bruises on the breast, and their circular position, mystified me, however, more than a little, for a cudgel or an iron bar would not have been capable of producing them. Suddenly I remembered hearing that at Valence the bravoës use long bags of hide, filled with sand, to beat to death the men they have been paid to kill. Instantly I remembered the Aragonian muleteer and his threat ; yet I dared scarcely think he had taken so terrible a revenge for a light pleasantry.

I went through the house, looking everywhere for traces of a forced entrance, and nowhere finding them. I went down into the garden to see if the assassins could have got in from that side ; but I could find no certain sign. The rain of the day before had, besides, so soaked the ground that it could not have kept very clear impressions. I noticed, however, some footsteps

deeply printed in the earth; ~~there~~ were steps in two contrary directions, but in the same line, beginning at the corner of the hedge by the tennis-court, and ending at the door of the house. Perhaps they were the steps of M. Alphonse when he went to look for his ring on the finger of the statue. On the other hand, the hedge was not so thick at this point as elsewhere, so that this was the likeliest place for the murderers to have got through it. Passing, and repassing before the statue, I stopped a moment to look at it. This time, I will admit, I could not contemplate without dread its expression of ironic wickedness; and, with my head all full of the horrible scenes I had just witnessed, I seemed to be looking at an infernal divinity, rejoicing in the misfortune that was striking the house.

I went back to my room and stayed there till noon. Then I came out and asked for news of my hosts. They were a little calmer. Mademoiselle de Puygarrig—I should say, the widow of M. Alphonse—had regained consciousness. She had even spoken to the King's Prosecutor from Perpignan, then on circuit at Ille, and that magistrate had taken her deposition. He asked me for mine. I told him what I knew, and did not hide from him my suspicions of the Aragonian muleteer. He ordered that he should be arrested on the spot.

'Have you learned anything from Madame Alphonse?' I asked the King's Prosecutor, when my deposition had been written down and signed.

'That unfortunate young woman has gone mad,' he replied, smiling sadly. 'Mad, absolutely mad. This is the story she makes :

"She had been in bed," she said, "for some minutes, the curtains drawn, when the door of her room opened, and some one came in." Madame Alphonse was then on the edge of the bed, her face turned to the wall. She made no movement, believing that it was her husband. After a moment the bed creaked, as though burdened with an enormous weight. She was very frightened, but dared not turn her head. Five minutes, ten minutes perhaps—she could not say how long—passed so. Then she made an involuntary movement, or else the person who was in the bed made one, and she felt the touch of something cold as ice . . . these are her expressions. She moved further towards the edge of the bed, trembling in every limb. A little later the door opened a second time, and some one came in who said, "Good-evening, little woman." Soon after that the curtains were drawn. She heard a stifled cry. The person who was in the bed beside her sat upright, and seemed to reach forward. She turned her head then . . . and saw, she says, her husband on his knees by the bed, his head level with the pillow, in the arms of a kind of greenish giant, who was violently squeezing him. She says, and repeated it to me twenty times, poor woman ! . . . she says she recognised . . . do you guess ? . . . the bronze Venus, M. de Peyrehorade's statue. . . . Since it has been in

the place, everybody dreams of it. But I take up the story of the unhappy madwoman. At this sight she lost consciousness, and probably, for some moments, her reason. She cannot in any way say how long she remained in her swoon. When she returned to herself, she again saw the phantom, or the statue, as she persists in saying, immobile, the legs and the lower part of the body in the bed, the bust and arms stretched forward, and between its arms her husband, motionless. A cock crew. Then the statue got out of the bed, let the corpse fall, and went out. Madame Alphonse tore at the bell, and the rest you know.'

They brought the Spaniard; he was calm, and defended himself with great sang-froid and presence of mind. For the rest, he did not deny the words I had heard; but he explained them, saying that he had not, meant anything but that the next day, after resting, he would win a game of tennis with his conqueror. I remember he added:

'When an Aragonian is insulted, he does not wait till the next day to avenge himself. If I had thought that M. Alphonse had wished to insult me, I should, on the spot, have given him my knife in the stomach.'

They compared his shoes with the footprints in the garden; his shoes were much the larger.

Finally, the innkeeper, at whose house the man was lodging, swore that he had spent the whole

night rubbing and doctoring one of his mules that was ill.

Besides, this Aragonian was a man of good reputation, well known in the place, where he came every year on his business. He was accordingly released, with apologies.

I was forgetting the deposition of a servant, the last who had seen M. Alphonse alive. At the moment when he was going up to his wife's room, he had called this man, and asked him in an anxious way if he knew where I was. The servant replied that he had not seen me. Then M. Alphonse sighed, and stayed more than a minute without speaking, and then said: 'Humph! The devil will have got him too!'

I asked the man if M. Alphonse was wearing his diamond ring when he spoke to him. The servant hesitated before answering; at last he said that he did not think so, and that, besides, he had not looked to see.

'If he had had the ring on his finger,' he added, recollecting himself, 'I should certainly have noticed it, for I thought he had given it to Madame Alphonse.'

In questioning this man, I felt something of the superstitious terror that Madame Alphonse's deposition had spread through the whole house. The King's Prosecutor looked at me with a smile, and I did not persist.

Some hours after the funeral of M. Alphonse, I prepared to leave Ille. M. de Peyrehorade's carriage was

to take me to Perpignan. In spite of his feeble condition, the poor old man wanted to accompany me as far as the gate of his garden. We crossed the garden in silence, he dragging himself with difficulty, leaning on my arm. At the moment of separation, I took a last look at the Venus. I foresaw clearly that my host, although he did not share the horror and hatred she inspired in part of his family, would wish to get rid of an object that would be continually reminding him of a terrible misfortune. My intention was to get him to put it in a museum. I was hesitating before opening the subject, when M. de Peyrehorade mechanically turned his eyes in the direction in which he saw me gazing. He perceived the statue, and instantly melted into tears. I embraced him, and, without daring to say a single word to him, got into the carriage.

Since I left I have never heard that any new light has been shed on this mysterious catastrophe.

M. de Peyrehorade died a few months after his son. In his will he left me his manuscripts, that perhaps I shall some day publish. I have not found in them the paper relating to the inscriptions on the Venus.

PS.—My friend M. de P. has just written to me from Perpignan that the statue is no more. After her husband's death, Madame de Peyrehorade's first care was to have it melted into a bell, and in this new form

it serves in the church at Ille. But, adds M. de P., it seems that an evil destiny pursues the owners of that bronze. Since this bell has rung at Ille, the vines have twice been frozen.

